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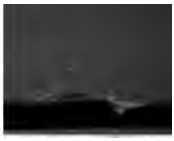

MOTHERING ON PERILOUS

BY

LUCY FURMAN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARY LANE McMILLAN
AND F. R. GRUGER

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1915

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To my Boys of Six Years Ago

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MOTHERING ON PERILOUS

MOTHERING ON PERILOUS

I

ARRIVAL ON PERILOUS

JOSLIN, KY.

Last Thursday in July.

Here I am at the end of the railroad, waiting to begin my two-days' wagon-trip across the mountains. But the school wagon has not arrived,—my landlady says it is delayed by a "tide" in the creeks. By way of cheering me, she has just given a graphic account of the twenty-year-old feud for which this small town is notorious, and has even offered to take me around and show me, on walls, floors and court-house steps, the blood-spots where seven or eight of the feudists have perished. I declined to go,—it is sad enough to know such things exist, without seeing them face to face. Be-

sides, I have enough that is depressing in my own thoughts.

When I locked the doors of the old home day before yesterday, I felt as a ghost may when it wanders forth from the tomb. For a year I had not been off the place; it seemed I should never have the courage to go again. For I am one whom death has robbed of everything,—not only of my present but of my future. In the past seven years all has gone; and with Mother's passing a year ago, my very reason for existence went.

And yet none knows better than I that this sitting down with sorrow is both dangerous and wrong; if there is any Lethe for such pain as mine, any way of filling in the lonely, dreaded years ahead of me, I must find it. It would be better if I had some spur of necessity to urge me on. As it is, I am all apathy. If there is anything that could interest me, it is some form of social service. A remarkable

settlement work being done in the mountains of my own state recently came to my attention; and I wrote the head-workers and arranged for the visit on which I am now embarked. I scarcely dare to hope, however, that I shall find a field of usefulness,—nothing interests me any more, and also, I have no gifts, and have never been trained for anything. My dearest ambition was to make a home, and have a houseful of children; and this, alas, was not to be!

Night.

Howard Cleves, a big boy from the settlement school, has just arrived with the wagon—he says he had to "lay by" twenty-four hours on account of the "tide"—and we are to start at five in the morning.

SETTLEMENT SCHOOL ON PERILOUS.

Sunday, In Bed.

I have passed through two days of torture in

that wagon. When we were not following the rocky beds of creeks, or sinking to the hubs in mudholes, we were winding around precipitous mountainsides where a misstep of the mules would have sent us hundreds of feet down. Nowhere was there an actual road,—as Howard expressed it, "This country is intended for nag-travel, not for wagons." The mules climbed over logs and bowlders, and up and down great shelves of rock, the jolting, crashing, banging were indescribable, my poor bones were racked until I actually wept from the pain and would have turned back long before noon of the first day if I could; the thirteen hours—during which we made twenty-six miles—seemed thirteen eons, and I fell into the feather-bed at the stopover place that first night hat, dress, shoes and all. Yesterday, having bought two pillows to sit on, I found the jolting more endurable, and was able to see some of the beauty through which we were passing. There

is no level land, nothing but creeks and mountains, the latter steep, though not very high, and covered mostly with virgin forest, though here and there a cornfield runs half-way up, and a lonely log house nestles at the base. There were looms and spinning-wheels in the porches of these homes, and always numbers of children ran out to see us pass. Just at noon we turned into Perilous Creek, the one the school is on. Here the bed was unusually wide and smooth, and I was enjoying the respite from racking and jolting, when Howard said with an anxious brow, "All these nice smooth places is liable to be quicksands,—last time I come over, it took four ox-teams to pull my span and wagon out. That's how it gets its name,—Perilous."

We escaped the quicks, thank heaven, and just at dark the welcome lights of the school shone out in the narrow valley. I was relieved to find I should be expected to remain in bed to-day.

Racked muscles, black-and-blue spots, and dislocated bones are not exactly pleasant; but physical pain is an actual relief after endless ache of heart and suffering of spirit.

A pretty, brown-eyed boy just brought in a pitcher of water, asked me if I came from the "level country" and how many times I had "rid" on the railroad train; and gave me the information that he was Philip Sidney Floyd, that his "paw" got his name out of a book, that his "maw" was dead, that he was "very nigh thirteen," and had worked for "the women" all summer.

II

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Monday Night.

Early this morning I was taken around by Philip and a smaller boy named Geordie to see the buildings,—handsome ones of logs, set in a narrow strip of bottom land along Perilous Creek. The "big house" especially, a great log structure of two-dozen rooms, where the settlement work goes on, and the teachers and girls live, is the most satisfying building I ever saw. There are also a good workshop, a pretty loom-house, and a small hospital, and the last shingles are being nailed on the large new schoolhouse. When I asked the boys why any schoolterm should begin the first of August, they ex-

plained that the children must go home and help their parents hoe corn during May, June and July.

All day the children who are to live in the school, and many more who hope to, were arriving, afoot or on nags, the boys, however small, in long trousers and black felt hats like their fathers, the girls a little more cheerfully dressed than their mothers, whose black sunbonnets and somber homespun dresses were depressing. Many of the parents stayed to dinner. There is a fine, old-fashioned dignity in their manners, and great gentleness in their voices. I have always heard that, shut away here in these mountains, some of the purest and best Anglo-Saxon blood in the nation is to be found; now I am sure of it. It was pathetic to see the eagerness of these men and women that their children should get learning, and to hear many of them tell how they themselves had had no chance whatever at an education, being

raised probably sixty or eighty miles from a school-house.

Late in the afternoon, as Philip, Geordie and I were fastening up straying rose-vines on the pine-tree pillars of the "big house" porch, a one-legged and very feeble man, accompanied by a boy, dismounted at the gate and came up the walk on a crutch. During the time he sat on the porch, my two assistants abandoned their work to stare open-mouthed at him. When he was called in to see the heads, Geordie inquired of his boy,

"How'd your paw git all lamed up that-away?"

The new arrival pulled his black hat down, frowned, and measured Geordie with gray, combative eyes, before replying, coldly,

"Warring with the Cheevers."

"Gee-oh, air you one of the Marrses from Trigger Branch of Powderhorn?"

"Yes."

"My two assistants abandoned work to stare open-mouthed at him."

"What's your name?"

"Nucky."

"How old air you?"

"Going-on-twelve."

"What kin is Blant Marrs to you?"

"My brother."

"You don't say so! Gee, I wisht I could see him! Have you holp any in the war?"

"Some." Here Nucky was called in, to the evident disappointment of his interlocutor. Later, I saw him at the supper-table, gazing disapprovingly about him.

After supper I had a few minutes talk with the busy head-workers, and placed myself at their disposal, with the explanation that I really knew very little about anything, except music and gardening. They said these things are just what they have been wanting,—that a friend has recently sent the school a piano (how did it ever cross these mountains!) and that some one to supervise garden operations

is especially needed. "Besides, what you don't know you can learn," they said, "we are always having to do impossible and unexpected things here,—our motto is 'Learn by doing.'" I am very dubious; but I promised to try it a month.

They told me that between six and seven hundred children had been turned away to-day for lack of room,—only sixty can live in the school, though two hundred more attend the day-school, which begins to-morrow.

Friday Night.

What a week! Foraging expeditions and music-lessons to big girls in the mornings, and in the afternoons, gardening, with a dozen small boys to keep busy. This is an industrial school, —in addition to the usual common-school subjects, woodwork, carpentry, blacksmithing, gardening, cooking, sewing, weaving and home-nursing are all taught, and the children in

residence also perform all the work on the place, indoors and out. But alas, my agricultural force is diminishing,—the small boys are leaving in batches. This is the first year any number have been taken to live in the school, and they are unable to endure the homesickness. Nucky Marrs left after one night's stay; three others followed Tuesday afternoon, and five on Wednesday; more were taken in, but left at once. Keats Salyer, a beautiful boy who has wept every minute of his stay, ran away a third time this morning. Yesterday Joab Atkins left when the housekeeper told him to help the girls pick chickens. Eight new boys came in to-day, but the veterans, Philip and Geordie, say these are aiming to leave to-morrow.

Friday is mill day in the mountains, and this morning, having had the boys shell corn, I took it to mill to be ground into meal, in a large "poke" (sack) slung across my saddle. When I had gone a mile up Perilous, the thing wriggled

from under me and fell off in the road. Of course I was powerless to lift it, though equally of course I got off the school nag and tried. There was nothing to do but sit on the roots of a great beech until somebody came along. Two men soon rode up, and smiling, dismounted and politely set the poke and me on Mandy again, and I reached the mill in safety. When I got back, my black china-silk was ruined from sitting on the meal.

III

ACQUIRING A FAMILY

Sunday.

Sure enough, the eight new boys were gone before sun-up yesterday, only Philip and Geordie remain, and gardening is at a standstill. All day yesterday and to-day I have thought of the runaways, and wondered if there is any way of making them stay and take advantage of their opportunities. Our young manual-training teacher, and only man, lives at the cottage with the dozen small boys; but, being a man, probably he cannot give them a home feeling, and get them rooted. Only a woman could do that. If I had the courage and cheerfulness, I would go over there and live with those little boys and try to make them feel at home. But it is useless

to think of such a thing,—my sadness would repel them,—they would run away faster than ever.

Monday Night.

The heads said to me this morning, "We shall give up trying to keep little boys in the school,—it is useless, though we need them almost as much as they need us. If there were just some one who loves children to stay there and take a real interest in them, they might be satisfied to remain."

"I love children," I said, "but I would not think of inflicting myself upon them,—I am not cheerful enough."

"Cheerful!" they exclaimed, "why, everybody is cheerful here,—no time for anything else! Suppose you try it!"

"I really couldn't think of it," I replied; but, fifteen minutes later, under the spell of their optimism, I was moving over from the big house to the small boys' cottage, from which

the manual-training teacher was departing to join the big boys over the workshop.

This small cottage is the building in which the work began here five years ago. It is separated from the rest of the school-grounds by a small branch; in its back yard is the wash-house, and beyond this the stable lot slopes down to Perilous Creek. There are four comfortable rooms, neatly papered with magazine pages,—a sitting-room, two bedrooms for the boys, and one for me. The woodwork in mine being battered, I sent Philip down to the nearby village for paint. He returned with a rich, rosy red, and began laying it on my mantelpiece with gusto, while Geordie Yonts put shelves in a goods-box for my bureau. Never have I seen a small chunk of a boy with such a large, ingratiating smile as Geordie's.

In the midst I heard a call from the road, and saw at the gate a nag bearing a woman and two small boys. "Here is Keats back again,—he

"'Here is Keats back again,—he has got to stay with you women and get l'arning if it kills him dead!'"

has got to stay with you women and get l'arning if it kills him dead!" declared his Spartan mother; "and I brung Hen this time, to keep him company,—he haint so tender-hearted." She sternly pushed the weeping Keats off the nag, and he flung himself down in the doorway, howling dismally. But little Hen, who cannot be more than nine, walked composedly into the house, looking about him with interest. He stopped before the almost-completed mantelpiece. "Gee, woman," he said, "that 'ere's the dad-burn prettiest fireboard ever I seed!" "If you like it, you shall have the same in your room, and all the rooms," I said. "Suppose you and Keats go down right now and buy me a gallon more of this paint. And I think we need some candy, too,—say a quarter's worth of peppermint sticks."

The tears miraculously left Keats's face, they hurried off, and later we had a feast of candy flavored with paint.

Tuesday.

A terrible night with fleas, and up at five (awful hour!) to teach the boys to make their beds and clean their rooms. Hen's first question was, "Woman, what's your name?" "Loring," I replied. "Haint you got nary nother?" "Yes, Cecilia." "Gee-oh, that's some shakes of a name. How old air you, Cecilia?" "I am old enough to have a Miss before my name always," I said, severely; "you must call me Miss Loring, just as people call your mother Mrs. Salyer."

"They don't," he replied, "they call her Nervesty."

"All these-here fotch-on women gits called Miss, son," admonished Geordie; "you haint used to their quare ways yet."

Later, there was another halloo from the road, and as Joab Atkins slid off the end of a mule, his father remarked to me, with extreme gentleness, that he allowed Joab would be

willing to pick a chicken now. Mr. Atkins is a handsome man, with perfect manners. When he said he had a younger son over on Rakeshin he would like to bring us, little Iry, ten years old, a "pure scholar, that knows the speller from kiver to kiver," I told him to bring Iry at once.

Just before supper I was pleased to see another runaway returned,—Nucky Marrs, of Trigger Branch. But before his father was out of sight up the road, he calmly announced to me that he didn't aim to stay, and that neither his paw nor anybody else was able to make him. I believed him,—one glance at his vivid face and combative eyes convinced me.

"Very well," I said, "if you cannot be happy, of course you must go. But it will hurt my feelings a good deal,—however, don't think of them."

"What difference is it to you?" he demanded.

"Only this,—I have lost everybody I love in

the world, and have come to the cottage to live with you boys because I am so terribly lonely. If you can't like me well enough to stay, life will seem a failure."

He pondered a long while, frowning a little, with large gray eyes fixed on my face. Then he said at last, "I don't know as I'll go right off."

"Oh, thank you," I replied, gratefully.

From seven to eight we have study-hour at the cottage. To-night Geordie watched the clock-hands for twenty minutes before they reached eight, then slammed his geography shut, and commanded,

"Tell about the Marrs-Cheever war!"

All the boys woke up at once, and Nucky began, slowly: "The Marrses has lived on Trigger ever sence allus-ago. My great-great-great-grandpaw fit under Washington and got a big land-grant out here and come out from Old Virginny. And the Cheevers they has allus lived down the branch from us. More'n

thirty year' gone, Israel Cheever he had a new survey made, and laid claim to a piece of our bottom where the lands jines; and him and his brothers tore down the dividing fence and sot it back up on our land; and the next week, my grandpaw and his boys sot it down where it belonged, and while they was at it, the Cheevers come up and they all fit a big battle. And ever sence, first one side and then t'other has been setting back the fence, and gen'ally a few gets kilt and a lot wounded. Six year gone, paw got his three brothers kilt and a leg shot off and a couple of bullets in his lung, in a battle, and haint been able to do a lick of work sence. Blant, my big brother, wa'n't but fifteen then, and he's had to make the living ever sence, with me to help him. And for five year' before he got good-grown, the Cheevers they helt our land, and Blant he laid low and put in all his spare time at gun practice. Then last fall, on the day Blant was twenty, he rounded up Rich

Tarrant and some more of his friends, and Uncle Billy's boys and me, and we tore up the fence, and sot it down on the old line where it ought to be; and the Cheevers, Israel and his ten boys, got wind of it, and come up, and there was the terriblest battle you ever seed."

"I heared about it," interrupted Geordie, "I heared Blant was the quickest on the trigger of any boy ever lived, and laid out the Cheevers scandlous."

"He kilt two of 'em dead that day, and wounded five or six more pretty bad," resumed Nucky, "and the fighting it went on, off and on, all winter. Every now and then, of a moonlight night, the Cheever boys would start to tear down the fence and set it back up; but we kep' a constant lookout, and was allus ready for 'em. Finally they got discouraged trying to fight Blant in the open, and tuck to ambushing. Three of 'em laywayed Blant under a cliff one day in April, and Elhannon got kilt, and

Todd and Dalt so bad wounded they left the country and went West. They are the youngest and feistiest of the lot,—t'other boys is mostly married and settled, and not anxious to risk their lives again' Blant's gun no more—and sence they went off, we have had a spell of peace."

"What do you do in the war?"

"Oh, I keep a lookout, and spy around, and stand guard over the fence with my gun."

"Gee, I wisht I had a war in my family!" sighed Philip, fervently.

Thursday.

Two more nights of suffering,—Philip said to me this morning, "I heared you up a-fleaing four or five times in the night." When I found that several panels of the back fence had been washed away by the "tide" of week-before-last, and that neighborhood hogs were coming in and out at will, and making their beds under my very room, I did not wonder.

This morning at the breakfast table, Philip's face was so dingy that I inquired, "Have you washed your face?"

"Yes," was his reply.

Something moved me to inquire further, "When?"

"Day before yesterday," he replied, with perfect nonchalance.

This is dangerous,—already I can see that Philip is to be, like his illustrious namesake, "the glass of fashion and the mold of form," and that the younger boys, will be only too ready to omit disagreeable rites if he does.

Poor Keats, who in the matter of beauty certainly lives up to his name, really seems inconsolable. While he cleans the chicken-yard in the mornings, my heart is wrung by hearing him chant the most dismal of songs,

Oh bury me not, on the broad pa-ra-a-ree,
Where the wild ky-oats will holler over me!

and in the hour after supper, when the others

play out of doors, he sits with me, telling about Nervesty and the four little children at home, and the spell of typhoid all the family had last year, when his father and little sister Dicey died, and how "Me 'n' Nervesty and Hen" have run the farm since then, tending fifteen acres of corn, besides clearing new-ground, and other labors. Poor little man, it is the knowledge that he is really needed at home, as much as homesickness, that preys on his mind,—his mother is making a noble sacrifice to let him stay in the school. It seems to comfort him somewhat to weep on a sympathetic bosom. Peppermint candy, too, is not without its efficacy.

To-day came Taulbee Bolling, a dignified boy of thirteen, with a critical eye, and later, Mr. Atkins again, with the "pure scholar" in tow. Iry is a thin, puny-looking mite of ten, much too small for his trousers. He said "Yes sir" and "No sir" most politely when

speaking to me, and carried an old blue-back speller under one arm. So great was my curiosity that I opened the book at once. The result was amazing,—"genealogical" and "ir-

"'Genealogical' and 'irreconcilable' were child's play to him, 'incomprehensibility,' a bagatelle."

reconcilable" were child's-play to him, "incomprehensibility," a bagatelle. It was interesting to see his scared little face brighten as he climbed up and down the hard words and beheld my growing astonishment.

This afternoon while I had the boys mending the back fence, Geordie, who had been left to scrub my floor with carbolic acid solution, came back to the stable-lot bringing a new boy, whom with a flourish of his brush he introduced as follows:

"Here's the boy that fit the marshal that kilt his paw. And one time he seed the world and rid on a railroad train. Killis Blair's the name he goes by." Killis is a handsome blonde boy of twelve, not unaware of his double importance.

To-night after study-hour there was another catechism by Geordie. "Tell about ridin' on the railroad train!" he ordered.

Killis began: "The month before paw got kilt last spring, the officers was a-watching him so clost he was afeared to sell any liquor round about home, so me and him we tuck a barrel acrost the mountains to Virginia, where there's mines, and it would fetch a good price. We

loaded fodder on top. The going was awful sorry, and the steers was three days at it. When I got there, I seed men walking round with their hats afire, and went down to the railroad-train and rid on the engine."

"What did it look like?" demanded Philip, breathlessly.

"Sort of like a saw-mill sot up on wheels."

"I'd sooner die as not to see one!" sighed Philip.

"I aim to see one when I'm a perfessor," remarked Taulbee.

"I bet I see a hundred when I go to be a soldier," said Nucky.

"I'd ruther see a railroad-train as to eat!" declared Geordie, and this appeared to be the prevailing sentiment, except with Keats, who said dismally that he didn't crave to see anything that would take him fifty mile' from Nervesty and home. After reflection, Hen agreed with him.

"Listen at them two homesicks!" remarked Philip, cuttingly.

Geordie folded his fat hands. "Now you might tell about your paw gettin' kilt," he said.

Killis said that the officers had been spying around on his "paw" a long time for "stilling" liquor, but that he was too smart for them, and moved the still about, and made liquor by night, and also frightened them by sending word to the marshal he would never be taken alive. That one night they had just "drug" the still up to a new place in the hollow, and he and his father and uncles were sitting around the fire, when there was a yell, and the marshal and a deputy burst in, shooting as they came. That his uncles returned the fire, but before his father could do so, he fell, with a dreadful wound through the stomach. That he himself, when he saw his father fall, snatched a hunting-knife and cut the marshal in the forearm with it as he was running out.

The last item he told without bragging, and quite as a matter of course. The other boys gave him looks of approval and envy, all save Nucky. "By Heck, I wouldn't have stopped with his arm," he declared.

"I haint," replied Killis, quietly.

Evidently I have two heroes on my hands!

Saturday Night.

Moses and Zachariah, two more runaways, were returned this morning, and this afternoon arrived my twelfth boy,—the last, since they cannot sleep more than three in a bed! Jason is a beautiful child of seven, very funny in his little long trousers. I wanted him at sight, but hesitated on account of his youth. When I heard from his father, however, that he had no mother now, I took him at once. Before leaving, Mr. Wyatt said that Jason was right pyeert about learning, and, he added candidly, about meanness too, and he hoped I would not spar' the rod. The rod indeed,— I threw a protecting

arm around the angelic-looking child at the word.

Indeed, not a few of the parents have warned me against wild and warlike tendencies in their offspring,—Mr. Marrs, for instance, said that Nucky was a master scholar when he could leave off fighting long enough to study his books, and others have admonished me to hold a tight rein. Their warnings are needless,—everything so far has gone with surprising smoothness, confirming my theory that in an atmosphere of love and gentleness the martial traits will be atrophied.

To-day things were more tumultuous, Saturday being combined wash-and-cleaning-day at the school, and a hard time for all hands. Ten of the girls came over from the big house to our back yard, and there, assisted by one of my boys, who kept up fires under the big kettles and carried water from the well, did the washing for the entire school; while in every building on

the place cleaning, scrubbing and window-washing were in full blast. I was sorry to have to punish little Hen to-night for calling it a "hell of a day."

IV

WAR, NOT PEACE

Monday Noon.

Yesterday morning I accompanied my boys to Sunday-school in the village. They showed a good deal of restlessness before the service was over,—not surprising considering that only two had ever heard of a Sunday-school before.

After dinner I undertook to cheer and entertain them by reading Robinson Crusoe, out in our yard, beginning in the thick of the story, where the hero is in sight of his island. What was my chagrin to see one pair after another of bright, roving eyes dull and close, one head after another roll over in the grass, Nucky Marrs holding out longest, and murmuring wearily, as

his head settled back against a tree, "Didn't he never get into no fights, or kill nobody?"

Discouraged, I sat for a long while gazing upon the twelve sleepers, and wondering what if anything would be the proper literary milk for my babes.

When the boys at last awoke from their naps, I gave them permission to play mumble-peg very, very quietly—the heads had told me to keep them quiet on Sundays—and they made a desperate effort to do so. But probably behavior so far had been impossibly good, and this was the last straw. At any rate, when we were gathered in the sitting-room after supper for ten minutes of Sunday-school lesson, the storm broke. Nucky kicked Killis on the shin; Killis called him a smotch-eyed polecat; the two grappled; Philip flew to Nucky's assistance, Joab to Killis's; Keats, Hen and Moses rushed in on the Marrs side, Taulbee, Zachariah and Iry on the Blair, little Jason flew

"I sat wondering what if anything would be the proper literary milk for my babes."

joyously into the fray, impartially attacking both sides, and Geordie prudently retired under the table.

It all happened in a flash,—before I could catch my breath the table was overturned, chairs were flying, bedlam had broken loose. In vain I commanded, implored, threatened,—I might as well have spoken to the raging sea.

Dreadful moments followed, during which I could only dodge chairs and wring my hands wildly. Worse was to come, however,—when I saw Killis grab the shovel, Nucky the poker, and Keats the tongs, while Philip wrested off a table-leg, and Taulbee and others either smashed chairs to pieces for weapons, or seized remaining table-legs, then indeed I felt that death was imminent for all concerned, and, running to the door, shrieked for Howard and the big boys over the workshop. Returning, I plucked the broom from Iry, and rushed with it, straw end foremost, into the thick of the

"The table was overturned, chairs were flying, bedlam had broken loose."

fight. I was lammed on the head by a shovel, on the shoulder by a table-leg, on the elbow by something,—it is not safe to say what might have been the outcome had not Howard opportunely arrived, snatched the broom from me, and, with the handle-end, beaten and whacked the boys mercilessly until they finally surrendered their weapons and retired, bloody but happy, from the "battle."

I lay long awake last night, not from fleas, but nursing bruises and reconstructing theories. I see now that love and gentleness need to be backed up by good muscle, and that to be a success in my undertaking here I require, not the small body I actually possess, but the physique of an Amazon. Of course it is all a mistake, and I must give it up, even sooner than I had anticipated. But I am sorry,—the boys are most attractive, and time spent with them passes with lightning swiftness,—incredible as it seems, for seven whole days I have

not had a chance to think of myself, my grief, my loneliness. Undoubtedly this is the Lethe I need,—but if its waves buffet me to bits, what then?

Later.

Inspiration came when I visited the loom-house this morning, and saw Cleo Royce, the head-weaving-girl, at her work. She is so large and handsome and strong,—a young Juno, with glorious muscle. The heads are to let her come to the cottage and occupy a cot in my room,—I am determined to stay out my month.

Wednesday.

For two days I have taken away their scanty playtime from the boys in punishment of their fighting Sunday night. Yesterday I talked to them very solemnly on the subject. "Why, it's just an accident you didn't kill one another or me," I said, "and then how should you have felt?"

"I'd hate right smart to kill a woman," replied Nucky Marrs; "but gee, I would'nt mind laying out a few boys. I got to begin somewheres,—a man haint nobody till he's kilt off a few!"

To-night when I announced that regular twice-a-week baths must begin at once, and that four of the boys must get ready to wash themselves, a shout of delight went up, "Whoopee! We git to go in the creek,—git to go in Perilous!" —and every boy demanded to be one of the lucky four. When I explained that I did not mean go in the creek, but that they must heat water in the kettles in the yard, and carry it to the tubs in the wash-house, and bathe there, howls of indignation succeeded. "We haint no women!", "I'll go home first!", "Dad burn if I'll do it!", "Creeks is for men!", and Philip remarked scathingly, "Nobody but quare women would wash in a house when there's a creek handy!" It was only by Cleo's splendid

strength that four were finally corralled in the wash-house.

Friday.

This has been an anxious week. The ice once broken by the fight Sunday night, every boy has felt free to be himself again. Nucky has fought every boy of his size and larger at the cottage, and, I hear, most of the hundred day-school boys; Killis, though not so aggressive, is quite as warlike; and the others, with the sole exception of Geordie, are not much behind. It is almost impossible for me to get garden-work done, so much of my time must be spent breaking up fights.

Even at meals (fortunately the boys and I have a table to ourselves in the dining-room at the big house) behavior is far from being what it should. Tuesday at breakfast, when Geordie undertook to instruct the new boys in table manners, and informed Killis it was not proper to eat with his knife, he was silenced by a jab

of the knife in his direction and a threat to cut out his liver; at dinner Wednesday, when Philip snatched a corn-dodger from Keats's plate, he received a spoonful of "sop" (gravy) full in the face; yesterday when Taulbee made disparaging remarks about Trigger Branch, Nucky plunged the prongs of a steel fork so deeply into his scalp that he had to receive attention from the trained nurse. It is difficult to eat with one's mind so distracted; but distraction is far better than desolation.

V

GETTING BETTER ACQUAINTED

Sunday Night.

I have been hunting Sunday clothes in the barrels sent us by kind friends,—the garments the children bring with them must be saved for hard, every-day wear. This morning, when I eagerly exhibited the Sunday things to the boys, I was doomed to disappointment. They expressed boundless contempt for the short trousers, flouted the knickerbockers as "meal pokes," and declined to wear the pleated and belted coats. Even the little sailor suit I had found for Jason was refused with scorn, as not being "for men." White shirts most of them accepted, but collars and ties were different,—Taulbee argued that even preachers didn't wear those, so why should he?

I was non-plussed for five minutes; then my eyes chanced to rest on Killis, the noted traveller. Sending the others from the room, I handed him a dark-blue suit, very little worn, and requested him to get into my closet and put it on, just for my pleasure. He did so, and when I had fastened a collar and a soft red tie on him, I invited him to look in my glass. He was frankly delighted. "By dogs, now, did you ever see anybody look as good as me?" he inquired.

"I think I never did," I replied with entire truth.

"If these breeches was just long, I'd keep these here clothes and wear 'em," he said.

"Short breeches," I assured him, "are the very latest style out in the level country; and," I added, "a boy who has seen the world and ridden on a railroad train is the very one to set new styles here,—the others would all follow what you did."

"'By dogs, now, did you ever see anybody look as good as me?'"

"Dad burn my looks, then, if I don't keep these and wear 'em!"

"Very well," I said, carelessly; "go along now and let me dress."

My dress was half-way over my head when the entire dozen burst into my room without knocking. Taking refuge in the closet, I let them examine the "new-styles," and fight it out over disputed garments. Later, having pinned all the collars, tied all the ties, parted all the hair, and at the last moment washed difficult cracks in all the ears, I set forth with my family for the "church-house," swelling more and more with pride at every step. Never anywhere have I seen such an aristocratic-looking set of boys.

After dinner, made wise by experience, I took them for a long walk up Perilous, to a beautiful, retired glen where they could play, fight (without weapons) and make all the noise they needed to.

On the way back, we met several women and girls on nags, and I was pained to see that my boys did not remove their hats. When I told them they must do so, Philip demanded why.

"To show the respect you feel for women," I replied.

"But I haint got none," he answered candidly; "they never done nothing for me. I'd ruther take off my hat to a cow,—I git something back from her!"

This from the namesake of the Pattern of Chivalry! Philip is very much of a man, and a prodigious worker,—in the shop he does better work than most of the grown-up boys, and is actually permitted to make walnut furniture for the big house—but he certainly lacks minor virtues, such as courtesy and cleanliness.

After supper I happened to ask Killis about his name, and told him I thought he must be named for Achilles, a hero who lived several thousand years ago, and was the greatest

fighter of his time. There were unanimous demands to hear all about him, and perforce I started in telling tales of the Trojan War. This time there was no drowsiness, but, as one great combat followed another, intense interest, and howls of remonstrance when I tried to stop.

I have found acceptable literary food for my babes,—but alas, what they want is not milk at all, but blood!

Wednesday Bed-time.

Jason, my "little pet" as the others call him, resents any allusion to the fact that he is small, and burns to play the man. In our garden work, he seizes shovels and mattocks almost as large as himself from the bigger boys, and whacks away joyously with them. To-day while we were making gravel walks, I caught him wheeling Geordie's barrow, while Geordie made feeble passes at the gravel-bank in the creek with Jason's little broken-handled pick. Geordie explained,

"That 'ere little Jason says he's aiming to leave if you give him little-boy jobs,—he wants big ones. I told him he could take my wheel-borrow awhile,—that I were willing to trade jobs with him, to favor him."

"I don't doubt you were," I said, sharply,—I begin to fear that Geordie's energy and talent reside mostly in his tongue.

"He's able to do it all right," continued Geordie, imperturbably. "By dogs, you ought to have seed him fight out two of them little day-schools at a time yesterday! Any boy can fight like that ought to labor some, and would have to if he weren't a pet!"

This evening while Keats gave me a glowing description of Nervesty's vinegar-pies (it would appear that his affection for her has no few of its roots in his stomach) and the other boys played numble-peg outside my window, what were my grief and surprise to hear the most fearful oaths I ever listened to issue from the sensitive lips

of the "pure scholar." Of course all the boys swear; but this was the worst ever. Where can he have learned it, and his father such a perfect gentleman? When I called him in and rebuked him, he was much downcast,—said he didn't aim to cuss, but he had been at it so long he couldn't quit. I told him the only way was to keep on trying, and how very, very happy it would make me when he should succeed; and he promised to try and *try*, "because," he added, almost in a whisper, "I like you." "And I *love* you," I said, gathering his thin little body to my heart. How happy his words made me,—they are the first to indicate that any of the boys care for me. They have a great deal of reserve, and are hard to get acquainted with, especially Nucky. But at least they are not leaving as they did.

VI

A TRADE AND OTHER MATTERS

Saturday Night.

Mrs. Salyer came in Thursday bringing some large pokes of beans, a gift to the school, and a saddle-bag full of apples for her boys. Next morning while supervising bed-making, I happened to glance into the box on the wall where Keats had put the apples the night before, and, to my surprise, saw that they were all gone. "We et half of 'em off'n'on in the night, and Keats traded t'other half off to Geordie before we got up," explained Hen,—the three occupy the same bed.

On my idle inquiry as to what Geordie gave for them, Keats produced with pride a mangy little purse, about the size of a dollar, looking as if it had been well-chewed.

"Why, that wasn't a fair trade," I said, "one apple would have been all that purse was worth. I must speak to Geordie about that."

Of course in the rush later I forgot it. Moses and Zachariah having departed without farewells later in the day, I gave Geordie permission next morning to go to an uncle's over on Bald Eagle and bring back his elder brother, Absalom, to the school. Before leaving, he "gave me his hand" to be back "before the sun-ball draps this evening." The sun-ball drapped and rose and drapped again, however, before he returned; and last night as the boys were starting to bed, Philip asked me if I knew how much Geordie had made on those apples he traded Keats out of. "He sold seven to the day-schools for a cent apiece, and six to the manimal trainer for a dime, and three to Taulbee for a big gingercake he brung with him, and I give him a good taw for a couple more, and he traded the two

little wormy ones that was left to Keats for a purse."

"What purse?" I inquired.

"That 'ere one Keats swapped him all the apples for at first,—the one you said weren't worth more'n one apple. Keats told him you said so, and he said he would prove it were by giving Keats two-down for it, if he wanted; and Keats was glad to make the trade."

"Do you mean to tell me," I asked, "that Geordie made seventeen cents, a gingercake, a taw *and* the purse, out of that trade, and Keats lost everything but two wormy apples?"

Philip scratched his head thoughtfully. "By grab, he skinned the little Salyer, didn't he? Gee, I wisht I was a born trader like him, dag gone his ole soul!"

When Geordie returned to-night with Absalom, his jaw was tied up in a red bandana, he wore a look of patient suffering, and explained

that he had had such a sorry time with tooth-ache he could not return yesterday, indignantly repudiating Philip's suggestion that he had just wanted to stay and see a big time with the Yontses and drink their moonshine. Later, when, while filling a hot-water bag for him, I regretfully spoke to him on the subject of cheating in trades, he was deeply hurt, said he had traded the apples back to Keats only to favor him, and confided in me that he aimed to be a preacher when he growed up.

Sunday Night.

During the ear-washing this morning, I had another round with Philip, whose ears are always the grimiest, hair the most unkempt, clothes the most tattered. "Philip," I said, with a groan, "you could be the handsomest boy on the place if you only would!"

He replied contemptuously, "Handsome never earnt his salt; when a man steps in the door, looks flies up the chimley!"

In the midst of our altercation, Absalom sauntered into my room, took his stand before my mirror, and proceeded to give his hair a good dressing with my brush and comb.

Later, as I saw Geordie walking to church with a Bible under his arm, heard his heart-felt singing of the hymns, and watched his pious, soap-shining face, I wondered I could ever have thought he meant to cheat anybody.

The Trojan War made fine progress to-night, —it is only on Saturday and Sunday nights that we can have stories, as other evenings must be spent in study. From the first, Killis has identified himself with his famous namesake, while Nucky has as inevitably taken sides with the Trojans and Hector, so much so that the boys call him "Trojan." This evening he was scathing in his denunciation of Achilles. "Gee," he said, "I wisht them Greeks had a-had a *man* along. Now if Blant had a-been there, you'd a seed some fighting! He wouldn't have sulled

around in no tent none! He'd a-got the drap on Hector allus-ago, same as he done on Elhannon and Todd and Dalt Cheever when they lay-wayed him in April. He was riding along past the cliff where they was hid in the bushes, and heared the click of the lock when Elhannon cocked his trigger, and whirled around and poured six bullets into 'em before they could fire their guns, killing Elhannon and very nigh killing t'other two."

Wednesday.

I expected that with Iry's abilities in the way of spelling, he would be the pride and prodigy of the school; but I am pained to learn from his teacher that he can do nothing but spell. It seems that in the five-month district school he has attended three terms over on Rakeshin, nothing was taught but reading and spelling,—two lessons a day in the former, two in the latter,—thus does our noble commonwealth do her duty when she does it at all! Iry has had to go

back into the first grade to learn the rudiments of arithmetic, geography, grammar, etc.

Last night Taulbee, the eldest, who is very opinionated, took occasion to enter a general protest against innovations such as night-gowns, tooth-brushes, fine-combs and the like, and wound up by arraigning the school methods of cooking. "Them little small biscuits you-all have don't make half of a good bite," he declared: "You women," he continued, severely, "think you know so much, and lay down so many laws, and, by Ned, you don't even know how to bile beans!"

"How should beans be cooked?" I inquired.

"A pot of string beans calls for a big chunk of fat pork and about four handful' of lard throwed in, to be fitten to eat," he said; "I haint tasted a right bean sence I come here."

This afternoon arrived a solemn little man of eleven from over on Clinch, named Hosea Fields, to take the one vacant place.

When Jason came up from his bath to-night, he rolled up his gown sleeve and held out a pink arm to me. "Just feel my muscle," he said, "Oh, I'm *so* nervy!"

"I reckon he is," said Keats, "I seed him lay out three-at-a-time of them little primaries at recess to-day."

Last time it was two, now it is three. Of course these reports must be exaggerated,—such a baby could not be so warlike. Taking him in my arms and giving him a good hug, I said, "Jason, dear, I want you to remember that it is wrong for little boys to fight."

Objections to bathing have been withdrawn, and the boys for some nights have gone to the wash-house with such alacrity that my suspicions were aroused, and I found they were taking advantage of their nude condition, and freedom from interruption, to do great stunts of fighting, the bathing being entirely lost sight of. I have been compelled to make a rule that each

"'Just feel my muscle,' he said, 'Oh, I'm so nervy!'"

boy must present himself in his clean gown after his bath at my door for inspection of head, ears, neck and feet.

VII

HEROES AND HERO WORSHIP

Saturday Bed-time.

While the boys were scrubbing their rooms after breakfast this morning, Keats sauntered in, saying he had finished his job of cleaning the chicken-yard. I went back, found it anything but clean, and called up to Hen, who was sweeping the back steps, "Tell Keats to come back here and clean this yard better!" He had just passed the word along, "Hi, son, she says for you to come back and lick your calf over!" (I am becoming used to being "she" and "her" on all occasions) when Nucky appeared in the back door, waving excitedly for me. Not knowing what battle, murder or sudden death might be in progress, I flew up the walk. The boys

were all hanging out the front door. Nucky shot me through them like a catapult, saying, "Take a look at that 'ere man,—it's Asher Hardwick, from over in Bloody Boyne. He's kilt twenty-four in war, and nine in peace, and wouldn't wipe his foot on Achilles!"

A gray, venerable-looking man was passing down the road on an ambling nag. "That man wouldn't hurt a fly," I said; "you must be mistaken."

"No, I haint,—I've seed him before. Of course he wouldn't hurt nobody less'n he was driv' to it; but the Mohuns just wouldn't give him no peace at all till they was all kilt off, —same as the Cheevers does us."

"But how could he kill nine in peace?" I asked.

"Kilt them just accidental,—they was witless folk that never knowed enough to keep out of his way when he was out after Mohuns. Asher he'd feel terrible about such as that."

To-night as I related more Trojan War, there were frequent interruptions from Nucky (who, during the stories, holds the place at my right hand always) such as, "I can beat that with Asher Hardwick!", "Blant wouldn't have took no such sass from Agamemnon or nobody!", and then would follow stories which did indeed sometimes beat Greeks and Trojans.

Later, he remarked, "If Hector and Achilles and them had a-lived now-a-days, they'd have got song-ballads made up about 'em, same as Asher and Blant. There's four or five about Asher—"

"I know one," interrupted Absalom.

"And there's one about Blant's revengement on the Cheevers when they laywayed him in April,—Basil Beaumont, over on Powderhorn, he made it."

"I know that, too," said Absalom.

"Achilles and Hector," I said, "did have song ballads made up about them, the very tales I am

relating to you now; and a great blind poet, named Homer, went about singing them from palace to palace."

"Same as Basil Beaumont," said Nucky; "he don't never do a lick of work,—folks gives him his bed and vittles just to set in the chimley-corner and pick and sing song-ballads."

Geordie had left the room when Absalom spoke; he now returned with a small, home-made banjo—produced, I suppose, from the mysterious locked box he keeps there—and Absalom, tuning it, began to pick and sing an indescribably bloody and doleful song, "The Doom of the Mohuns," which fairly made my blood run cold. This finished, "Blant's Revengement" was demanded and sung, the words of it being as follows:

Blant Marrs he was a fighting boy,
  Most handy with his gun.
On Trigger Branch of Powderhorn
  His famous deeds were done.

For thirty year' the war it raged
All o'er a strip of bottom.
Sometimes the Marrses triumphed strong,
Again, the Cheevers got 'em.

His paw lamed up, his uncles kilt,
Five year' Blant mourned his land,
Until, good-grown, beside the fence
He took his battle-stand.

Then Ben and Jeems they bit the dust
And perished in their gore,
And many Cheevers his good gun
Felt sharp, and dreaded sore.

Elhannon, Todd and Dalton then
Planned Blant for to layway
All unbeknownst, while travelling
Upon a fair spring day.

Beneath a cliff where Trigger bends
In ambush they lay low.
Oh, Blant, you better say your prayers!
Death lurks at your elbow!

Oh, Blant, I wish you was safe at home;
I think you'll never be;
I would not give a tallow-dip
For all your chance I see!

He comes, he hears a swift lock click,
And, swifter than the wind,
He turns, six barrels emptying
Before they can begin.

Elhannon nevermore will see
The sun rise o'er the peak;
And Todd and Dalt, up from their wounds,
Far, absent countries seek.

During the singing, the other boys cast envious glaces in Nucky's direction, and Philip probably voiced the sentiments of all when he exclaimed,

"Dag gone, I wisht I had a big brother as mean as Blant!"

VIII

DRESS, CHIVALRY AND THE TROJAN WAR

Sunday Evening.

When we were ready to start for church this morning, I was surprised to see Nucky halt before me, and eye me frowningly from head to foot. "What makes you allus wear ole ugly clothes?" he inquired. "Haint you got no pretty ones, like t'other women?"

I looked down at my black crepe de chine,—of course I have worn deep mourning since I lost Mother, and for six years before I had not had on a color. "You don't like it?" I asked.

"I'd as soon look at a coal-bank, or a buzzard," he replied.

It suddenly struck me that the dear ones I have loved and lost would be of much the same

opinion. "Wait a minute, boys," I said. I flew back and pulled from my trunk a white dress and some black ribbons laid away a year ago. When I emerged, there was a chorus of pleased "gee-ohs" and a decided accession of friendliness, the boys trying who could be first in helping me over the frightful mudholes between the school and the village. I see my duty clear now,—white dresses instead of black.

Thursday.

Considering the antecedents of Nucky and Killis, I was not surprised when they informed me this morning they would make beds no longer, but would leave unless given men's work all the time. My reply, "But making beds *is* men's work," was met by incredulous whistles.

"Now, boys," I said, "how about soldiers,—do you call them men?"

"By grab, them's the only men *is* men,—I'd ruther be dead as not to be one," said Nucky.

"Gee, fighting's the best job there is," agreed Killis.

"Well, soldiers make their beds every single day," I said; "I have a cousin right now at West Point, learning to be a soldier, and when he gets out he will command a whole company, and he makes his bed every morning, and couldn't be a soldier if he didn't."

The two stood, dazed and pondering, for some minutes; then Nucky quietly flung an end of the sheet across to Killis, with the words, "There, son, take-a-holt of that kiver, and le's lay it straight!"

To my great relief, I heard Keats singing a more cheerful song at his work to-day:

> Wisht I was a little turkle-dove,
> Setting on a limb so high.
> I'd take my darling on my knee
> And bid this world goodbye!

and at dinner, by actual count, he ate nine corn-dodgers, three helpings of string-beans,

four sweet-potatoes and I know not how much sorghum.

He still sits with me in the evenings, and I feel now that I have always known Nervesty and the four small children at home, especially Sammy the baby, not to mention Charlie, the "flea-bit" nag, Ole Suke, the "pied" cow, with her twin sons the steers Buck and Brandy, and her daughter Reddy the heifer (now the proud possessor of a little "pied" calf and a "blind" teat), also the big black sow, Julia, who, true to mountain traditions, never has less than nine in her family, and above all the wonderful dog, Ponto, who appears to be all that a dog can, and more. And not infrequently during these talks Keats is called out to help fight some antagonist of Hen's (though there is often civil war between the brothers, they always combine against outside aggression); and at other times Hen will pause breathless on his swift way through house or yard to corroborate some statement of

Keats's with, "Gee, woman, that 'ere's a dandy of a dog! He can do anything but climb a tree, and he gits half-way up them. He rounds up the shoats and drives up Ole Suke and the steers gooder than I can; and possums! ground-hogs! polecats! dad burn my looks if he haint the beatenest ever you seed!"

Friday.

I have tried all along to respect Jason's feelings, and give him jobs which would injure neither his pride nor his person. But yesterday while we were spading up a patch for turnip-and-mustard-greens, I forgot and sent him off to the school-yard to pick up trash. An hour later, I heard from a passer-by that he had been seen a mile up Perilous. "Don't you recollect him a-saying he would leave if you give him little-boy jobs?" Geordie reminded me.

"Saddle the nag and hurry after him," I implored Taulbee. Sometime later, he overtook the proud child on his way to Spraddle

Creek, and brought him back under protest.

The boys say they see no good reason why they should say "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am." When I told them it was for the sake of politeness, Philip replied, "Polite's a lick-spittle,—I don't aim to be polite,—I don't *have* to,—I'm able to get what I want without it!"

This last is only too true. "For they shall take who have the power, and they shall keep who can," is the creed of all, but more especially of Philip. This noon, when Iry's father had sent him from Rakeshin a fine, yellow, mellow apple, and the "pure scholar" was eating it as frugally and lingeringly as possible, Philip, came along, snatched it, bit off three-fourths, and coolly handed back the fragment to Iry, who, howling dismally, still had no redress.

"To think you could do such a base thing!" I exclaimed,—"Rob a little boy who cannot

defend himself. You ought to be everlastingly ashamed!"

"I was behind the door when shame passed by," replied the robber, flippantly.

"You were indeed," I agreed; "I would not believe that a boy named Philip Sidney could be guilty of such a thing." Then I told him the story of the great Sir Philip, mortally wounded, fevered and athirst, handing the cup of water to the dying soldier beside him, with the words, "Your need is greater than mine."

He pondered a moment, then remarked, "No man'd be such a fool,—I bet it's just a slander they made up on him!"

I told him he should lose three days' play-time for his rapacity.

Sunday Night.

Last night the Trojan War reached a climax in the death of Horse-Taming Hector, amid shouts of joy from Killis, and howls of fury from Nucky. I have seen for two weeks that consid-

erable feeling has developed between the two on the subject, intensifying the natural jealousy each has of the prowess and reputation of the other.

This morning I had left the boys at the big house to help with the breakfast dishes—the regular Sunday proceeding—and was standing in the back cottage door drinking in the beauty of the morning and the Sabbath peace of the hills, when savage yells smote my ears. Following the sound, I ran to the school-yard. When I arrived, Nucky had just buried his teeth in Killis's arm, from which the blood was spurting, while Killis was striking out fiercely with his knife. Around the combatants the other boys formed a delighted, cheering circle, within which Philip danced madly about, shouting,

> Fight, dogs, you haint no kin,
> 'F you kill one another, taint no sin!

In another second, Nucky had abandoned the hold with his teeth, and was flashing his own

"'Fight, dogs, you haint no kin,
'F you kill one another, taint
no sin!'"

knife around Killis's throat. With a shinny-stick, I knocked up one knife after the other, and kept death at bay until four of the grown-up boys arrived and with difficulty separated the heroes and escorted them to the hospital to have their wounds staunched and dressed. Later, I heard that Nucky had begun it by leaping upon Killis with the words, "I'll show you Hector haint dead yet!"

To-night when I had the two in durance vile, and talked to them more severely than I had yet done on the evils of fighting, Nucky, the aggressor, gave as his excuse that his great-great-great-grandpaw had fit the British, his great-great-grandpaw the Indians, his great-grandpaw the Mexicans, his grandpaw the Rebels, and his paw and Blant the Cheevers ever since he could recollect, and that he himself was just bound to fight.

This was sound reasoning; and it brought before me with hitherto unrealized force the

fact that these boys are in very truth the sons of heroes,—of forefathers who fought gloriously for freedom in the Revolution, afterward subdued the wilderness and the savages, and have since poured forth as one man from their fastnesses to safeguard the Union in every emergency; and that here, forgotten and neglected by an ungrateful state and nation, is the precious stuff of which great patriots and heroes are made.

Therefore I did not upbraid Nucky and Killis further; I merely explained to them the difference between fighting just to be fighting, and fighting to save one's country, and, since they had no idea who the "British," the "Mexicans" and the "Rebels" were, told them something of the history and causes of those wars, and how I hoped that they, too, when necessary, would fight for their nation. And though to them at first their country meant their mountains only, and they were surprised to hear that the great

"level land" beyond was also theirs to love and fight for, their affections were hospitable, and with one voice they demanded that an enemy of the nation be produced at once.

Here endeth the Trojan War,—I see that it has fanned a flame already too intense. Even little Jason slipped out under the benches at church this morning, while I played the organ, and was found an hour later out in the road in front of the court-house, covered with mud, but glowing with the white-hot joy of having "whupped-out four-at-a-time" of the little village boys. Hereafter I shall tell and read stories of heroes who won glory by fighting, not one another, but dragons, giants, gorgons, and like destroyers of their countries.

Nucky inquired of me at supper to-night when he might make a visit home to Trigger; whereupon there was an instant and unanimous offer on the part of the boys to accompany him, when he goes, and see the hero Blant. He

shook his head. "I haint aiming to take none of you," he said, "not if she'll go 'long with me," looking at me.

"I?" I said, much complimented. "Why, surely I will if I can. But it is three weeks yet before your time comes:"—the children are permitted to go home over week-ends every seven or eight weeks, in rotation. I am glad he wants me, and feel a considerable desire to visit Trigger.

IX

MORE TRADING, AND SOME FAMILY HISTORY

First Monday in September.

Four weeks to-day since I acquired my family of sons, and now it seems as if I had had them always. So far from being ready to leave now my month is out, wild horses could not drag me away. The hours, once so leaden, pass with lightning swiftness; there is never any time for depression, or for looking into a desolate and dreaded future; my days are crammed with human interest, exciting as a dime novel. Besides, although I see no evidence that the boys care much for me, I care a great deal for them, and would not willingly leave them.

Geordie brought back with him from our walk yesterday a large bundle of elder-poles. This

morning, mumble-peg went out, and pop-guns came in, like a clap of thunder, and I heard that Geordie was selling lengths of elder to the boys for two cents, or a satisfactory equivalent. It was impossible this afternoon to get manure hauled to the new flower-borders,—every time a barrow would get out of sight, the wheeler would sit down on it and go to whittling a pop-gun. After being scolded a third time, Philip complained bitterly to me,

"If you never wanted us to have pop-guns, whyn't you take them poles away from Geordie yesterday? Dad burn my looks, we git all the blame, and he gits all the gain,—he's a making it hand over fist."

"He was the only one who thought of putting the elder to use," I said. "I suppose he has a right to his gains."

Philip sadly admitted the justice of this view. "Dag gone *me*," he sighed, "I wisht I was a born trader and forelooker like him! Good

thing I haint aiming to be no preacher, I'd starve to death the first week. But Geordie he's cut out for it."

"I'm afraid I don't see the connection between trading and preaching," I said.

"Well, preachers can't take no money for preaching—it would be a sin—and they haint got much time for tending craps and such, and less'n they good traders they mighty apt to starve. Geordie he haint never going to run out of wheat-flour, let alone corn meal. Gee! if you could see the things he's got in that locked box of his!"

"What has he?" I asked.

"Oh, *I* haint never seed 'em,—nobody haint; but any minute in the day he can run his hand in and pull out something a boy'll think he's pine-blank bound to have or die!"

When I heard to-night that Keats's tooth-brush, Jason's blue necktie I gave him, Hen's fine-comb and pencil, Iry's "gallusses," and

Nucky's only handkerchief, were among the articles traded for pop-gun material, I was moved to wrath with Geordie; but when he displayed to me the small and apparently worthless things he had accepted from other boys,—a torn woolen comforter from Taulbee, Killis's holey mittens, Joab's worn-out yarn socks, and a handful of rusty horse-shoe nails from Hosea, it seemed to me that, on the whole, there had not been such exorbitant exchanges for the joy of a pop-gun, and I softened my reprimand.

Thursday.

Mrs. Salyer rode in to-day to see her boys, a watermelon in one saddle-pocket, a lot of fine pawpaws in the other. Oh the joy of the "two homesicks"! Before leaving, she said that her cousin Emmeline's funeral occasion was set for the fourth Saturday and Sunday in October, and she hoped her boys might be permitted to come home at that time and pay their respects to

Emmeline, adding that she would be pleased to have me come with them. In answer to my puzzled inquiries—for I failed to see how Emmeline's death could be so nicely calculated in advance—she explained that funerals are never held in this country at the time of burial, when it is usually impossible to get a preacher, but that they are conducted in deliberate and appropriate style a year or two after the death.

This is to be the little Salyers' first visit home—we think it best they shall not go until then—and never, I suppose, was a funeral-occasion the subject of such desire and rejoicing.

Sunday Night.

For two weeks we have been reading Hawthorne's Wonder Tales; and this afternoon on our walk the boys, led by Nucky, searched hopefully in caves, coal-banks and rock-dens for gorgons, minotaurs and dragons, finding nothing worse, however, than a few rattlesnakes and copperheads,—a tame substitute

and an old story. But the value of drawing their minds to foes in the abstract is already apparent,—they fight less, and traits other than martial are coming to the front. Nucky has been giving his energies to learning, with results that astonish. His teacher says she has never seen such mental alertness. She has already put him up two grades, and says if he keeps on he may go up another this half-term. Iry, too, is proving his right to his title of "pure scholar."

To-night when we began again on the Wonder Book, Nucky said, "I can tell you a story that beats them,—all about a man by the name of Christian, that fit with devils, and come near being et up by a giant ten times as big as him."

There were loud cries of, "Tell it, Trojan!"; and he launched forth into a most graphic version of Pilgrim's Progress, the other boys listening absorbed throughout the evening. When all started off to bed, I called Nucky back.

"Where did you learn that story?" I asked him.

"I have knowed it sence allus-ago," he said; "Maw she used to read it to me out of a book with pictures."

It is the first time he has spoken of his mother,—I hear from the other boys that he lost her quite recently.

"Then your mother had learning?" I inquired.

"She never got any inside a school-house," he replied; "but her great-grandpaw he had a sight of learning, and when he was a' old man, too feeble to do anything but set by the fire, he teached her how to read and write and figger, and was so proud of her being a scholar that when he come to die he left her what books he had,—there is several, all yallow and crumbly. One is a Bible; but the one I like is this-here about Christian and the devils. I used to lay and look at it by the hour, and learnt to read a-trying on it."

This is most interesting as being another proof that the early settlers of this country were men of an education impossible to their descendants. It also helps to account for Nucky's remarkable mentality. He grasps a thing almost before it is spoken, has only to read over his lessons once, and remembers the stories I tell and read with surprising minuteness.

Wednesday.

I suppose I might have expected some ill effects from the hero-tales. When I went down to inspect the stable-lot this morning, I found three barn cats writhing in their death agonies, and Jason galloping off on a stick-horse, brandishing a shinny-bat. His explanation that he was Bellerophon, the stick Pegasus, and the cats the three heads of the Chimæra failed to mollify me. I gave him his first taste of "the rod," and did not "spar'" it. Evidently the child has a poetic imagination, which must not be permitted to run riot.

X

ABOUT MOTHERS

Saturday Night.

The little Salyers, while really fond of one another, have queer ways sometimes of showing it. This afternoon Keats called up wearily from the back yard, where for eight hours he had been carrying water and keeping up fires for the wash-girls, to Hen in the doorway, "What time is it, son?" to receive the affectionate reply, "Time all dogs was dead,—haint you sick?"

To-night, sitting around our lamp, eating peppermint candy, the boys got to talking about their mothers, living or dead,—Keats and Hen of course about Nervesty, Taulbee, Killis and Hosea about their good mothers at home, Geordie and Absalom about theirs who is mar-

ried again and lives in Virginia, and Philip, Joab, Iry and Jason about theirs who are dead. Nucky alone did not talk,—it seems impossible for him to speak of his mother.

Iry told many little incidents his remarkable memory enables him to recall, though his mother died when he was only three. One is, standing beside her while she fed him beans and sorghum from a spoon; another, having a small paddle and helping her "battle" the clothes as she washed them beside the branch; still another, being left by her in a pen made of rails and a log high up on the mountainside where she was hoeing corn, seeing a beautiful, shining, spotted thing come out on the log to sun itself, and amusing himself poking his finger at the pretty creature to make it lick out its tongue, rattle its tail, and "quile" itself up, till suddenly something fell on the bright head, and his mother, with a terrible scream, threw down her hoe and caught him to her bosom. These and

other scraps of recollection the "pure scholar" treasures so tenderly it seems hard indeed that his mother should have taken the "breast-complaint,—some calls it the galloping consumpt'," and died so young, missing his love.

"You know," I said to him, "that being dead isn't really being dead, but just gone out of sight. Your dear mother still lives and loves and watches over you constantly, though you cannot see her."

"I allus heared dead folks was just h'ants, trying to layway and scare folks," said Iry.

"Nothing of the kind," I assured him; "they can never be seen by these eyes of ours, but they are near, quite near us always, to love and protect us, especially mothers their orphan children."

There was a long silence. Then, with a sigh, little Iry exclaimed, slowly, "Dag gone, I wisht somebody'd a-told me that before,—I wouldn't a-been so lonesome!"

Nucky, who had not spoken a word during the conversation, got up and hurried from the room. At bed-time, Hen slipped into my door to report, "I tracked Trojan to the hayloft, and heared him a-laying up there crying fit to kill for his maw."

Poor child,—the still waters run deep!

Sunday Night.

Nucky asked for extra work during his play-time yesterday in order to make some money, and for three hours spaded flower-beds, receiving a dime in pay, and making a mysterious visit to the village after supper. This morning when I was ready for church, he came into my room with a yard of bright pink ribbon dangling from his hand. This he held out to me, saying,

"You allus go about with them old black strings on, and haint got no pretty fixings like t'other women,—I allow you're too poor to buy 'em. I want you to have something pretty."

For seven years I have not had on a color,—I

never supposed I could wear one again. But I slowly unfastened the black ribbon from my collar, and replaced it with the pink. Then I put my arms around Nucky, and kissed him.

"I *was* poor,—horribly poor, Nucky," I said, "before I got you and the other boys. But I shall never feel poor again, after receiving such a precious gift as this!"

Precious indeed it is, not only as representing untold sacrifice on his part, but as showing that he really cares for me,—he is so reserved and self-contained I did not dream he did.

One thing is certain,—I will try to deserve his sacrifice and love,—to-morrow I will send away not only for bright ribbons, but for cheerful dresses which shall please his eyes and those of the others. No longer shall they see me in garments of heaviness.

Tuesday.

This noon, Iry, who since our first talk about swearing, has been trying without much success

to stop it—sometimes he bites off the tail of a swear-word, but generally the head and trunk escape him—ran into my room with big eyes. "Geordie and me was a-quarling over a shinny-bat he traded me out of, and I started to say a' awful cuss-word at him, and then I ricollected what you said about my maw a-watching me all the time, and I never said a thing to him but 'Dad burn your ole soul!'"

I congratulated the "pure scholar" on his great victory, and encouraged him to press on.

Wednesday, Bed-time.

To-day was Mother's birthday. While I was placing a bowl of asters before her picture over my fireboard, Nucky came in, and I spoke to him about her, telling him how her love and courage had sustained me through deepest sorrow, and how terribly I miss her now. After a while he said, in a low voice, "I miss my maw, too."

"Tell me about her," I said.

Then, little by little, and often with great difficulty, and with long silences, he told me the story of his mother; how devoted she had been to her children, and how eager that they, and especially he, should get learning, teaching him what she could, getting a little district school established on Trigger three years ago, and coming over herself to this school last April to try and get him in here, being nag-flung on her way home, and sustaining injuries which caused her to die a month later when her last baby was born; how on her deathbed she had called her family around her, and given them her love and blessing and advice, asking her husband never to put a "step-maw" over her children, and leaving them all in Blant's charge, confiding to his special care the day-old baby, "your paw being too puny to set up with it of nights," and passing away at last clinging to them and weeping bitter tears that she must leave them. He also told how Blant had accepted his sacred

trust; tenderly and tirelessly minding the younger children, cooking and cleaning; when not out tending the crop, clearing new-ground, logging and the like, and how, above all, he has devoted himself to "the babe," patiently walking the floor with it at night, warming its bottle, jolting it on his knee, toasting its little feet before the fire, sleeping with it on his arm, and "making it sugar-teats and soot-tea as good as a woman." This being the same Blant who "never goes out without a gun," and has done such notable slaughter in the hereditary "war" with the Cheevers!

I own to a large curiosity to behold this hero—more than ever since I heard what Nucky told me to-day. I am glad that the visit to Trigger comes the end of this week.

XI

OVER ON TRIGGER

Monday Morning.

Soon after breakfast on Saturday we set out on our sixteen-mile ride to Trigger Branch, I on Mandy, Nucky walking,—he refused to ride behind, remarking, "I'm allus used to seeing the women ride there." The day was glorious, the way more and more beautiful as we proceeded. We crossed three mountains, stopping on the top of one, where the sunlight sifted down through translucent beech leaves, to eat our lunch, and then "followed" Powderhorn, a large creek, two or three miles, finally turning up Trigger Branch. At its mouth, Nucky pointed out the little log school-house in which he has received his education up to this term, and farther on he showed me various rocks and

trees where he has delighted to "layway" and "ambush" infant Cheevers. Trigger Branch is the most picturesque creek I have yet seen; along its sides cliffs and "rock-houses" alternate with rich hollows, small strips of bottom, and steep but flourishing cornfields. All the houses we passed on the lower reaches belonged to Cheevers, sons of Israel, and last of all was Israel's home. Three "sights," or about a half-mile above this, is the disputed boundary-line, which runs down from a mountain spur on the right hand side, and then across a piece of bottom to the branch. The bone of contention is a triangular slice of bottom, with its apex at the foot of the spur, not an acre in extent, all told. As Nucky pointed it out to me, I looked with mingled curiosity and horror. The fence of course now stands on the ancient line claimed by the Marrses, where it has stood for nearly a century and a quarter.

"It is impossible to believe that more than a

dozen lives have been sacrificed for this little piece of land," I said to Nucky, "why, I doubt if you could raise forty bushels of corn a year on it."

His face flushed. "It haint the money's worth," he said, proudly; "we don't care nothing about that. But it was granted to my great-great-great-grandpaw for fighting the British, and me'n' Blant would ruther die than part with a' inch of it."

He pointed to a thick, dark clump of hemlock near the foot of the spur, on the Marrs land. "That's where I keep lookout of moonlight nights when war is on," he said.

As we advanced, he showed me the steep cornfields tended by Blant and himself, the almost upright pastures where some cattle and sheep were feeding, and above, the virgin forest where Blant gets out yellow poplar and other fine timber, and on the very crest of the ridge, the gray, forbidding "high rocks" that

"'That's where I keep lookout of moonlight nights when war is on.'"

are so fine for fox-hunts, and also, he says, for "hiding out" in if officers get too troublesome.

"Blant he has a whole passel of warrants hanging over him," he said, "and the sheriff and deputies they used to come over every now and then last winter a-hunting him. Of course he couldn't afford to give hisself up, or put in no time in jail, when he was so bad needed at home; and at first he would take to the rocks when he seed 'em a-coming. But that was a heap of trouble, and he got mighty tired of it, and so next time they rid up he tuck his pistol and stepped out and told 'em that, bad as he hated to do it, circumstances was such that he would have to fire on 'em if they kep' bothering around; that he had the living to make for the family, and no time to spend setting around enjoying hisself in jail,—that with him duty come before pleasure, and he would have to request 'em to leave him alone. And seeing how he felt about it, they never come again for quite

a spell,—not till after he kilt Elhannon in April. Then they kotch him purely by accident, but he got away from 'em that night,—I'll tell you about it sometime."

We were now approaching the Marrs house, a large, substantial one of logs, built on the time-honored pattern of "two pens and a passage,"—that is, two huge rooms, with an open hallway, below, and a great "loft", large enough for six ordinary rooms, above. "Cap'n Enoch Marrs raised it, more'n a hundred year' gone," said Nucky.

Entering the open passage, which was hung with saddles, bridles and gearing of all sorts, and also with strings of beans and peppers, we passed into one of the lower rooms. Mr. Marrs arose, coughing, from one of the three large beds, upon which he had been resting, and welcomed me most kindly. In front of the great fireplace, four young children were gathered, and the eldest of these, a little woman of eight,

held in her arms an infant, upon whom I looked with special interest. This, then, was "the babe,"—a beautiful, tiny girl-child of five months, with large gray eyes in a small white face, and the brightest of little smiles.

The room was bare save for the beds, some chairs, and a great homemade chest of drawers. On the fireboard were a clock and a few books, yellow and crumbly, as Nucky had said, and above, across wooden pegs set in the wall, rested a long, old-fashioned rifle, with a powder-horn slung on one end.

"This here's the gun Cap'n Enoch Marrs fit the British with," said Nucky, with bursting pride; "it's mine now,—paw give it to me on account of my name."

Half an hour later, the hero, Blant, came in from "saving" fodder. I gazed at him with all my might. He is a tall young man, with Nucky's fine gray eyes and dark hair, an open face and a resolute jaw. After greeting me in the gentlest

of voices, he picked up the babe, who, clinging to him with cries and coos of joy, buried her little face in his bosom. He then went on with her across the passage and into the other large room, whither Nucky followed him, and the two began preparations for supper. Several times I saw Blant pass the open door, always with the babe on his left arm, and once with a bowl of cornmeal, once a stack of roasting-ears, once a skillet of meat, in the other. As I looked, I said to myself over and over, "Is it possible this is a slayer of men, an eluder and defier of the law?"

It also occurred to me for the first time that I was adding to his already heavy burdens; and I reproached myself for coming; but there was no help for it now.

Supper at last being ready, Mr. Marrs, leaning feebly on his crutch, conducted me into "t'other house," the children took their stands and we our seats about the table, and Blant,

"As I looked, I said to myself over and over, 'Is it possible this is the slayer of men, an eluder and defier of the law?'"

still with the babe on his arm, did the honors, pouring the coffee, and then impartially sharing with the babe the beans, fat meat, roasting-ears and sweet-potatoes on his plate. While of course the house in many ways shows the absence of woman's care, Blant's filling of his mother's place is indeed remarkable.

Later, my offer of help in the dish-washing being kindly but firmly refused, I returned to the first room with Mr. Marrs and the children, and we sat and talked. Of course I made no reference to the family "war," but I did inquire as much as possible in regard to ancient family history, and was shown the old Bible, the records of which go back to Captain Enoch Marrs, the first settler here. Mr. Marrs, however, told me that there are traditions that before the Marrses came to America, they were brave and gentle folk for five hundred years in Old England, and poured out their blood like water for the glory of their country. "I allow

from what I have heared that we have always been a fighting race," he said. "My great-grandpaw used to set up and tell big tales, which he got from his paw, how first one and then t'other of us fit for his king in ancient days, and won glory and renown,—I mind there was a famous admiral under Good Queen Bess, and before him a general that licked out the French nation—but I haint able to ricollect names and circumstances, having been too young and unknowing when I heared them tales to take proper interest, which I regret now."

I shared his regret,—with so many good and aristocratic English names in this mountain country, I have been quite sure that some of them harked back to a brave and honorable past, and it would be especially pleasing to me to trace Nucky's line to its old English home, and through its brave deeds for king and country.

While we talked, Blant returned, with the babe and Nucky, and a little later, Blant's

bosom friend, Richard Tarrant, came in from across the mountain. He is a strikingly attractive young man. Before he had stayed long, he said,

"I have got bad news for you, Blant,—it is being talked that Todd and Dalt Cheever has got powerful homesick out west, and is aiming to come back before long. I hope it haint so,—I had looked forward to a right smart spell of peace for you,—God knows you have got your hands full, without no further warfare."

"I think Todd and Dalt will be satisfied to stay away a while yet," replied Blant, quietly; "I allow this is just one of Israel's lies."

"Well, I hope so," said Rich; "but forewarned is forearmed, and I thought you ought to know the talk."

"I want to know about it quick as they come," spoke up Nucky, hastily; "you can't no way get along without me to keep lookout."

Blant turned sternly upon him. "No matter

what the news is, son," he admonished, "you stay right there where you air, and don't dare to leave and come home. You know maw's desires in regards to your getting l'arning. I promised her I'd carry 'em out, and now I aim to do it. You stay over there, or you'll have me to reckon with. I got Rich here to help me if need be, and likewise Uncle Billy's boys,—what I haint able to tend to myself."

Nucky's face flushed angrily; but he said no more.

When bed-time came, the family slept downstairs—besides the three beds in one room, there was another in the kitchen—and I was shown up to a comfortable feather-bed in the great loft. Long after everybody else was asleep, I heard the poor little babe wailing pitiably below, and Blant softly walking the floor with it, jolting it back and forth in his chair, and trotting it on his knees before the fire. No wonder the little creature suffered

agonies after eating the things it got for supper.

After breakfast in the morning, Nucky invited me to go for a walk. We ascended one of the spurs of the mountain in the rear of the house,—never have I seen a more beautiful site for a home than in that hollow—and a third of the way up, on a small "bench," came upon what appeared to be a play-village. Beneath spreading trees, were a dozen or more diminutive houses, with latticed sides and roofs of riven oak boards. Some were crumbling into decay, some new and substantial. The one to which Nucky led me was still yellow. "Here's where Maw lays," he said, almost in a whisper (I judge that one reason he finds it so hard to speak of her is his feeling that he, or rather, her desire for his education, was in a way the cause of her death), and I knew that this must be the family burying-ground, and these the grave-houses once so necessary for the protection of

the dead from wild beasts, and still surviving here in the customs of the mountain country.

Near the grave-house of his mother were three smaller ones, still good and new. "Our three young uns betwixt Blant and me died of typhoid one summer, about five yéar' gone," Nucky explained. China-asters were blossoming gaily among the weeds about these grave-houses. "Maw she sot 'em there," Nucky said, "she liked to come here and rest a spell when she was hoeing corn, and set with these young uns."

The tragedy of the life of Nucky's mother was brought forcibly before me as I stood there. An eager-minded, loving-hearted woman, shut off from all opportunity, the bringer of ten new lives into the world, laboring and drudging as only these mountain women know how to for the sustenance and clothing of her family, suffering constant anxiety as to the very lives of her loved ones by reason of the family "war,"

and finally having to go out into the darkness of death and bid them all farewell,—surely it is a sad and tragic history.

As we turned away, Nucky added, "With them three young uns around her, I allow she haint so lonesome as she would be all by herself."

"No," I said, "having her loved ones with her, she is happier far, even in heaven. For it is that which makes heaven."

Blant had dinner for us at eleven, and soon afterward we were ready to depart. "Come over and see us sometime at the school," I called to Blant, as he stood with the babe on his arm by the gate. He thanked me gravely, but did not say he would come.

"Gee," said Nucky, as we rode on, "he can't never do that,—why they'd just *have* to arrest him if he run into the jaws of the sheriff and the jail that way!"

We made the last hour or two of our journey

through moonlight in which the mist-hung mountains and shadowed valleys lay entrancingly lovely.

"This is the kind of nights I allus keep watch for the Cheevers," said Nucky.

I wondered if these were the sole thoughts aroused in him by the wondrous beauty in which he had been born and bred. Presently I knew.

"If maw is in heaven, like you say, do you allow the country round about there is any prettier than this here?" he asked.

"No, I am sure not," I replied, emphatically.

XII

THE FIGHTINGEST BOY

Tuesday Night.

Nucky ran in to-night from shinny, to have a "broke" ankle tied up, (it seems to me I am always tying up either "risings," "biles," sores or hurts) and said to me while I did it,

"That 'ere little Jason is just a-chawing up and spitting out them little day-schools. This morning at recess I seed him whup out five-at-a-time. Yes, sir, five was on him, and by Ned if he didn't lay out the last one. He's the fightingest boy you got!"

"I thought you were that," I said.

"Dad burn ole Heck if ever I seed the day I could lay out five of my size at a time! Going to school there on Trigger, I have whupped out as many as three Cheever young uns at a time;

but five! Gee! I wisht I knowed how he done it!"

These accounts of Jason's prowess seem unbelievable; but from the mouths of many witnesses I gather that they must be true. I, too, wonder how he does it.

Wednesday.

Evidently Jason's success with the little primaries is going to his head, for to-day he attacked Hen Salyer, who is a head taller, and would have vanquished him had not Keats come to the rescue. As it was, he gave the Salyers a lively battle, and enormously increased their respect for him. My most vigorous applications of the rod appear powerless to curb this aggressiveness.

Thursday.

While we were out in force this afternoon, digging the ditch which is to drain our garden, Nucky spoke up, apropos of nothing,

"'F I had a boy 't wouldn't fight, I'd tie him

to a good sapling and fill him so full of bullets the buzzards wouldn't eat him!"

Having observed anything but a lack of the "fighting edge" since my arrival on Perilous, I saw no point in this remark, and let it pass. Nucky spoke again, accusingly,

"You got one," he said; "you got a boy 't won't fight!"

"I?" I demanded in amazement.

"Iry Atkins yander. Little Jason Wyatt's been a-picking on him for three days, and he's afeared to fight him back, by Ned!"

"You're a liar, Trojan!" spoke up the "pure scholar," hotly; "I haint fit him because I'm a-minding her. She said for us not to fight him because he were so little. I can fight as good as you, dag gone you!"

"Le's see you then, dad swinge you!"

Iry rushed upon Nucky with murder in his eye, and it took Taulbee and me, aided by a hoe-handle, to separate them.

Iry's conscientiousness is very gratifying. I wish that I could remove the interdict made at first for Jason's protection; but probably it had better remain now for Iry's.

Friday Night.

When Jason and Keats came up from the wash-house to-night in their fresh gowns, looking startlingly clean, (I let them bathe together because Keats is so kind-hearted, and carries the water from kettles to tubs for Jason, and even washes his back for him) I handed Keats a pair of scissors. "Do you mind cutting Jason's toenails?" I asked; "I notice that they are dreadfully long."

To my utter confounding, Jason threw himself on the floor, kicking and beating it violently and letting out terrific yells.

"Why, it won't hurt you, dear," I said, "or, if you fear Keats will, I will gladly do it myself."

The howls and yells increased if possible.

"He haint afeared of being hurt," said

Keats; "he just don't aim to part with them toe-nails."

"Why?" I inquired.

"He needs 'em in his business. He fights with 'em. I found it out when him and Hen fit a-Tuesday. He tried it on me, the feisty little skunk! That's the way he lays out the day-schools five-at-a-time. He jobs out the eyes of two with his thumbs, and bites and butts another, and rakes the shins of two more with his toe-nails, and whups out five as easy as falling off a log!"

"They certainly must come off then," I declared sternly. "You hold one leg, and Killis one, and Philip and Taulbee his arms and head, and I'll cut them off!"

And thus surprised of his secret, and bound by the Philistines, my little Samson was shorn.

Saturday Afternoon.

Before breakfast I called Iry into my room. "How much muscle have you got?" I inquired.

The "pure scholar" bared a small, skeleton arm, on which a creditable knot of muscle rose as he flexed it.

"You are really a pretty good fighter, aren't you?" I asked.

"Paw he'd knock me in the head if I weren't."

"Very well. I told you once not to fight Jason Wyatt. I may have been wrong in doing so. Next time he picks on you, fight him back."

Just before noon, Nucky ran into the cottage with bulging eyes. "That 'ere little Iry is a-giving Jason the best whupping down in the stable-lot ever you seed. Jason he got to feisting around him ag'in, and he just grabbed him unexpected, and laid him out, and now he's choking the life out of him!"

"Good!" I cried, hurrying back to see the combat. All the boys were miraculously gathered, and the wash-girls also looked on with delight. Jason tried all his tricks, but could not once free himself from the relentless grasp.

"'That 'ere little Iry is a-giving Jason the best whupping down in the stable-lot ever you seed.'"

Both arms were pinioned, one by a leg, one by an arm of Iry's, his head was held down by the dreadful hand at his throat; only his legs were free, and they alas, were useless,—his toes passed harmlessly over Iry's face and neck and ears!

Not until he had held out to the verge of suffocation did the conquered conqueror at last gasp for mercy, and being let up, crawl off under the corncrib to sob out his rage and shame in peace.

Doubtless this will do him much good.

XIII

AROUND THE FIRE

Second Monday, October.

Though the days are still warm, the nights are getting cool, and for the sake of bare toes we began last night having a fire in the sitting-room. It was the one thing needed,—I see that with its glowing warmth to gather around, our family life will henceforth be much more intimate and cheerful. Sydney Lanier says that two things are necessary to the making of a real home,—an open fire and music. We have both. The fire had hardly begun to crackle before Absalom had the banjo out, and was singing in the chimney corner,—not bloody, recent song-ballads this time, but, to my joy, famous old English ones forgotten centuries ago by the rest of the world but wonderfully preserved here in

the mountain country. "Barbara Allen" was one ballad he sang; "Turkish Lady," "The Brown Girl," and "The Specter Ship" were others. All the tunes were queer, minor, and long-drawn-out, and sung in a kind of falsetto; and between verses there is a very weary period of picking.

The boys all declare they prefer the newer ballads, such as "Blant's Revengement," and "The Doom of the Mohuns," and that these old ones are fit only for women-folks; but I noticed they listened absorbed.

Friday.

Yesterday a wagon came in from the railroad,—a great occasion it is when one arrives, all of us women flocking out and surrounding it before the mules can stop, and receiving the packages and boxes destined for us as if they were the most precious jewels,—indeed, they are valuable after coming that long and difficult way. I was glad to find that my cheerful dresses

ordered last month had arrived, as well as the wire corn-poppers and some rolls of wall-paper with great red roses for our sitting-room.

Saturday Night.

Cleo and Howard put the lovely red paper on our sitting-room to-day,—when the boys and I came in from the garden it was all done, and a shout of delight went up. Of course they have never seen anything so beautiful.

I had another surprise for them. Prettiest of all my new dresses is a cardinal crêpe de chine, exactly matching the wall-paper. I put it on for supper to-night, getting to the dining-room a little late. There was much excitement at our table as I entered, and Jason created a sensation by calling out, in his shrill voice, "Oh, yander comes my red stick of candy!" Nucky said not a word; but the pride in his eyes was sufficient. All during the meal, the boys vied with one another in passing me things, and in saying "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am"; and I saw them

glancing around at other tables to observe the effect of my grand costume.

Who, seeing me sit here before our cottage fire this evening, clothed in the color of life and joy, with my happy and cheerful family close around, would ever believe me to be the same woman who arrived here something more than two months ago, with a heart even more dark and desolate than her garb of woe? Truly, the ways and goodness of God are past imagining.

Thursday Night.

That the fraternal affection of the little Salyers is sound at the core (much evidence to the contrary notwithstanding) was proved beyond doubt by an occurrence last night. Hen is by nature deliberate, and is especially so about washing his feet and getting undressed at night, not yet having become reconciled in his mind to either process. He always retires after Keats, and, now the nights are cooler, first tries to root Keats out of his warm place, and, failing in that,

doubles up and plants his cold feet in the middle of Keats's back. The long-suffering Keats rebels, and then follow howls, yells and a pitched battle, with shrill cries for me from Geordie Yonts, the third boy in the bed. When I arrive, the covers are on the floor, and the brothers fighting all over their own bed, the other bed and boys, and the entire room, and calling down horrible imprecations upon each other. In vain I have forbidden the use of the shocking language,—neither threats nor punishments have prevailed. Last night, after a particularly bad time, I called them into my room, explained to them the full meaning of the words they were using, and asked if either could possibly hate his brother enough to wish to consign him to eternal torment. They made no answer, but went off looking thoughtful. To-night when shrieks and howls announced the usual battle, and I hurried to the scene, the Salyers were pounding each other as mercilessly as ever, but this time, to

my unspeakable relief, they were calling out furiously, "God *help* you!" "God *help* you!",—a decided change for the better, and, I thought, a most timely petition!

In their sane moments now, they talk of nothing but Cousin Emmeline's funeral occasion and the visit home, and it is impossible for them to decide whom they most desire to see,—whether Nervesty, or Sammy, or Ponto, or the steers Buck and Brandy; while their longing extends also to the other children, and to Charlie the "flea-bit" nag, Ole Suke, the "pied" cow, Reddy the heifer, and the black sow, Julia.

Sunday Evening.

On our way to the "church-house" this morning, I noticed that Iry wore the long, ample homespun trousers in which he arrived. "Where are the Sunday breeches I gave you?" I inquired.

"There they air," he said, pointing to

Geordie's fat legs, which seemed about to burst out of a pair of dark blue short trousers.

"Iry he just pestered me into trading with him," was Geordie's explanation, "he said he were bound to have that gold ring I got out of a prize box last week. Show it to her, Iry."

Iry put forth a small, dingy hand, adorned with a large, elaborate brass ring.

"But you can see that wasn't a fair trade," I said indignantly to Geordie.

"I knowed it weren't,—I knowed that ring were worth five times them breeches, and I'd never see its like ag'in. But I felt sorry for him, he wanted it so bad."

"No, I mean just the other way," I said sharply, "you paid a nickel for that prize-box, didn't you?"

"Yes'm."

"And there was candy in it?"

"A little-grain."

"And you ate it?"

"What there were of it."

"And now you want to trade him the ring, which cannot be worth more than two cents, for his Sunday breeches."

The "born trader" looked at me pityingly. "Miss Loring," he said, "womenfolks haint got no understanding of prize-boxes. Sometimes you pay your nickel down and don't git ary thing in 'em; and then ag'in there's jewelries nobody can't tell *what* they worth, they so fine. Thaint nary ring like that ever been seed in these parts. Iry Atkins's got the onliest ring like it on Perilous, or I reckon in Kent County, or maybe in Kentucky! What's breeches to that?"

To this master argument, the fact that the ring would not keep Iry's legs warm in winter seemed a puerile answer; still, with cold weather coming on, and clothing scarce as hens' teeth, I was compelled to break up the trade, and to forbid Geordie's making any more.

In the afternoon we went up Perilous, per-

simmon and buckeye hunting, and later, after filling their shirt-fronts with the shiny ammunition, the boys lined up on opposite sides of the creek and had a buckeye-battle.

After supper I began reading the Story of Odysseus. When we came to the place where the hero makes his escape from the cave of Polyphemus, Nucky interrupted to tell the tale he promised while we were on Trigger, of Blant's escape last spring, when for the first and only time he was arrested by officers. It was the day when he was "laywayed" by Elhannon, Todd and Dalt, and had killed one, and almost killed the other two. The sheriff happened to be on Powderhorn, near the mouth of Trigger, at the time, received the news at once, and reached the Marrs home within an hour after the occurrence. Blant, not dreaming of so prompt an attempt at arrest, was sitting before the fire cleaning his forty-five; and before he knew it, the sheriff stepped between him and his

ammunition. Quiet surrender was the only possible thing. The sheriff and deputy started with him to the jail here in our village; but, being overtaken by darkness on the way, were obliged to stop overnight at a wayside house. Blant went to bed, handcuffed, between the sheriff and deputy, each of whom retired with a loaded revolver in his hand. In the morning the prisoner was gone, the blanket that had covered the three swung from the window, and the two revolvers were found on the ground beneath, placed neatly side by side.

"Thaint no men or no prison nowhere Blant couldn't git away from if he was a mind to," said Nucky; "he wouldn't fool around and see his friends et up like Odysseus."

The character of Odysseus also brought out some family history from Geordie and Absalom. It appears that their grandfather, Old George Yonts, was a man noted in several ways, as a hard-shell preacher, as a wonderful nag-trader,

and, like Odysseus, as a man of craft and guile in wars. Warring factions would come to him for advice; and his stratagems, when carried out, were brilliantly successful. The boys, with much pride, told some awful instances. They also said that all of his thirteen sons were "mean men," their own father having met death at too early an age to become as distinguished as the other twelve. As I listened, I marvelled, not that the "born trader's" morality is a little oblique, but that he has any at all.

Wednesday.

To-day I saw Philip hold out a handful of chestnuts to Taulbee, his bosom friend, with the words, "Don't take more'n five,—you're owing me now. You haint gone treat for allus!" Perfect candor is evidently the sure, if rocky, foundation of their relationship.

Saturday Night.

More family history as we were roasting

sweet-potatoes in the hot ashes under our fire to-night. Iry said he could recollect roasting them while the men made his maw's coffin. "I never knowed no better," he said; "I weren't but three, and thought she was laying there asleep. I wondered what them men was a-hammering at outside. When I seed 'em take her off in it, I knowed."

"She were the best step-maw ever I had," remarked Joab, feelingly.

"How many have you had?" I inquired.

"Oh, paw he's had about five women," he mused. "My maw first, and then Iry's, and there's three sence. Serildy Byng, his next-to-last, was a middling civil woman; but she never stayed long. This last one is just fifteen, and haint got no manners. I have to fight her most every day, she picks on me'n Iry so. Paw he has a sorry time learning her to behave."

"I have heared something about your paw being right smart of a mean man," said Philip.

"Bet he can't hold a candle to Blant," put in Nucky, jealously.

"Maybe he can't, and maybe he can," drawled Joab, provokingly.

"Nobody haint as quick on the trigger as Blant," declared Nucky; "I'll bet nobody haint kilt and wounded more inside a few months than him, or would have been in jail more times if the officers could have kotch him and helt him."

"Jail," murmured Joab, contemptuously, "jail haint nothing! My paw's spent two year at Frankfort!"

The boys all exclaimed in admiration. "Gee-oh," said Philip, with new respect, "I never knowed he'd been penitentiaried."

"How many has he kilt?" inquired Nucky, skeptically.

"Oh, no more'n he had to," drawled Joab.

"I heared something about his killing off a few Lusks," said Taulbee.

"Yes, a few," admitted Joab; "Serildy Byng, that next-to-last of his, she got to talking some to a couple of the Lusks, and paw got wind of it, and kotch 'em a-hanging around one day. But he never kilt but one dead; and soon as t'other got able to talk, he sot all the Lusks ag'in paw,—there was nine on his track, laywaying and ambushing. At last one day they all rid up behind him over on the head of Rakeshin. He seed a turn in the road ahead, where there was a big rock. Every time they'd shoot, he'd jump like he was hit; and just as he got to the rock, he spraddled out flat on his nag, like he was dead. That was the last they seed, and they come up a-whooping, thinking they had him kilt. And about that time six of 'em got bullets in 'em, and three drapped dead; for paw had clim up on the rock and was a-laying for 'em. Time the rest of the Lusks got up from their wounds, they allowed paw was a mean enough man to leave alone."

Nucky was silenced. The impressive pause that followed was at last broken by Philip. "What did he do to Serildy?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, but shoot off a piece of her jaw and a little-grain of her scalp."

Philip meditated again. "I expect that's the reason Serildy left your paw, haint it? Women's so quare."

"Maybe," replied Joab, indifferently.

Oh, my perfect gentleman!

Thursday.

Shinny went out and ball came in yesterday. When at noon the boys all ran to me begging for yarn (of course store balls are an unknown luxury) and when later I saw Philip, Keats and Hosea ravelling out old socks they said they had bought from Geordie, Taulbee engaged upon a piece of the old comforter he had traded off for a pop-gun, and now bought back at a ruinous price, and heard Killis and Joab bemoaning the fact that they had traded mittens

and socks off for pop-guns, and telling of the vast sums Geordie was making selling these and like remains to the "day-schools," I realized that even as far back as pop-gun time the fore-looker was dealing in ball futures, and that his transactions then were not even as magnanimous as I had supposed them to be.

Saturday and Sunday are the longed-for days of Cousin Emmeline's funeral occasion, we are to start to-morrow (Friday) afternoon, and the "two homesicks" are beside themselves with joy.

XIV

THE VISIT HOME, AND THE FUNERAL OCCASION

Sunday Night.

Friday noon the little Salyers, Jason (whom I did not dare leave behind) and I were all ready to start. Nucky, who has the stable job, had just brought Mandy around in the road and helped me into the saddle, and was handing me a switch, when suddenly I saw his fingers stiffen, his eyes widen, his face pale. Looking around for the cause, I saw two youngish men riding past in the road. Apparently they did not see him; but he eyed them with concentrated hatred. I hardly needed his low-spoken words, "Todd and Dalt," to tell me who they were.

"I got to go home quick as I can get there,"

he said, when they had passed out of hearing.

"You shall do nothing of the kind," I declared; "you heard Blant's commands on the subject. He is perfectly able to take care of himself, and does not want you. I, too, command you to stay here."

"But he *haint* able to take care of hisself now he's got the babe on his hands," Nucky insisted; "he can't noway keep lookout: of course they have come back to kill him if they can. I couldn't rest here a minute."

"Nevertheless, I command you to stay," I said sternly, as I took my departure.

But for my anxiety about him, and about this new threatening of "war" on Trigger, my visit to the little Salyers' home would have been a perfect thing. The day was glorious as we went, the mountains one blaze of reds, yellows and greens. All the way, the "two homesicks" were urging Mandy on with voice or hickory or

both; while, entranced with the beauty, I earnestly wished that she might be permitted to go her natural gait.

After following Perilous four miles, we turned up Nancy's Perilous, and went along it nearly an hour before we reached a small log house, almost hidden in apple trees, and Mrs. Salyer, with the four little children and Ponto trailing before and after, came out to welcome us. Although tears of joy stood in her eyes, she did not hug or kiss or "make over" her boys,—such displays of feeling being permissible only in or over babies. Little Sammy availed himself of his privilege to the fullest extent, gurgling, laughing and shouting at sight of his brothers, while Ponto, in equal exemption from the bonds of etiquette, nearly knocked them down in his joy. The two pretty little girls of five and three, being exhorted to "shake hands with the woman, Susanna and Neely," did so most politely; and Hiram, the seven-year-old, tore his gaze from

Jason (they were engaged in a mutual size-up) long enough to go through the same ceremony.

The boys made at once for the apple trees, and I was invited in. Mrs. Salyer was just finishing her day's stint of weaving, and sat in the loom and threw the swift shuttle while we conversed. Seeing her for the first time without the black sunbonnet, I realized where the boys get their extreme beauty.

I asked her, of course, about family history, and learned that her ancestors, too, came out from Old Virginia more than a century ago, and had been men of education and parts. "The later generations," she said, "haint had the ghost of a chance, shut away here without no l'arning, and so hard put to it to keep bread in their mouths that half of 'em never hears what's happening yan side the mountain. It don't look like it's right for young ones to grow up this way, without no show at all. I am determined mine shall get one."

She also talked a good deal about Mr. Salyer, who she says was "as pretty a man as the wind ever blowed on," and one of the "workingest" in this section. Evidently she feels his loss very deeply; but she faces life with prodigious courage, shouldering his burdens in addition to her own, and thinking nothing of plowing, grubbing, clearing, and like heavy work, which she does cheerfully rather than keep her boys out of school. Her faith is touching. "God has give me this fine mess of young ones," she says; "now I look to Him for strength to feed and raise them."

Several times our conversation was interrupted by shy statements from the little girls that Hiram and Jason were fighting all over the yard; but no bloodshed being as yet reported, little attention was paid.

When the time came for active preparations for supper, I was taken out by the boys to "see things." First, the nags, Mandy and the "flea-

bit" Charlie, were watered in the branch, and fed; then the steers must be brought down and "nubbined." They were grazing far up in a hollow, but at a word Ponto was off, and soon brought them down, starting again on a quest of his own. Then the boys put yokes on them and drove them around the steep stable-lot for my pleasure. Keats said he and Hen had to tie their tails together while breaking them, to keep them from turning the yokes; but now they go along quietly, as well conducted steers should, and evidently with perfect understanding of the strange talk of their young masters, which was Greek to me. I could comprehend the "Gee, Buck!",—"Git along there, Brandy!"; but the oft-repeated "Oo-cum-weh, woo-oo!", and "Now-wa-*chat*-tum!" were indeed puzzling. Then Ole Suke, the pied cow, hearing the excitement, came up, or rather, down, of her own accord, followed by Reddy the heifer, whose little spotted calf welcomed her loudly across the

rails. Nothing would do but Keats must milk Reddy then and there, to demonstrate the remarkable deficiency of the "blind teat" beforementioned.

Just as he had proved this to everybody's satisfaction, yelps from Ponto could be heard approaching, and in another moment a large, raw-boned black sow stepped sedately out of the woods on the other side of the branch, and stood meditating. An instant later, she was surrounded by a company of half-grown shoats, which squealed and scurried before Ponto's onslaughts. But evidently Julia herself lived in a serene atmosphere, and took orders from no one. After scrutinizing all of us, and assuring herself that the boys really were Keats and Hen, she grunted deeply and came forward. Not until she got out of the tall weeds, and into the branch, was the joyful discovery made that nine little new pigs followed her closely and shamefacedly. They could not be two days old,—of course they

"Not until she got out of the tall weeds, and into the branch, was the joyful discovery made that nine little new pigs followed her closely and shamefacedly."

had come purposely to celebrate the boys' visit home,—no one could doubt that! Great was the delight that followed, great the pride expressed in Julia and all her performances. And what a good bait of corn Julia and the shoats got, while the babies helped themselves to their dinner, all but the poor little runt, who was crowded entirely out of reach of his until Hen spanked two of the others and made a place for him!

After making the acquaintance and hearing the family history of various chickens, turkeys, guineas and geese, I was taken up the hollow to the famous pawpaw patch, scene of innumerable 'possum hunts. Here even Ponto showed lively memories of past victories, while Keats, Hen and Hiram all talked at once, describing combats, and pointing out the very trees and logs. Some details of natural history I was able to gather from the confusion, such as: possums allus sull-up when they are kotch; boar possums

does a heap of fighting, and it's a sight to hear their noses crack when they are at it, and the best sport ever seed is to ketch two and sic 'em ag'in each other; sow-possums do not fight, and the young uns curl their tails round their maw's and ride on her back when she travels; and, finally, possums are a master-race for wiles, and it is the mark of a man to be able to outwit them.

But darkness was beginning to fall, and when the gourd-horn blew for supper, nobody tarried on the way down. Oh, what beans, what "'taters," what "roasting-years," what corn-bread, and above all, what a noble vinegar-pie! Nervesty's reputation was fully sustained,—dangerously so, I feared, as I watched the boys gorge.

Then, while Mrs. Salyer and Keats went out to milk after supper, Hen and Susanna and Neely and I washed up the dishes; and while we were at it, Hiram and Jason were pulled apart, Jason with a gouged eye and a bitten arm, Hiram with a bloody nose and a raked shin. Then,

Mrs. Salyer and Keats returning, and everybody being very sleepy indeed, we all went to bed in "t'other house," the little girls and I in one bed, Mrs. Salyer, Sammy and Keats in a second, and Hiram, Hen and Jason in the third (Hen in the middle). We had some general conversation after retiring, and it was all very happy and sociable. And of course Ponto slept in the room, too, and when, faithful guardian, he was not running to the door to growl at imaginary intruders, he was thumping his tail on the floor, or turning round and round before the fire to settle himself to his satisfaction.

Saturday morning, Keats, Hen and even I tried to beg off from the funeral occasion; but of course it was useless; and there was a busy time getting ready to start. A little past noon, I, on Mandy, with Susanna behind me, and Mrs. Salyer on Charlie, with Sammy before and Neely behind, reached the top of Bee Tree Gap, and looked down into the valley on the far side,

the boys racing ahead of us. On a hill-shoulder below, grave-houses were visible, and people and nags were moving about.

Still farther down the valley, Mrs. Salyer showed me Emmeline's lonely little home. Emmeline, she said, had died a year and three months before, during the typhoid that took off Mr. Salyer, leaving a virtuous and pious memory, seven small children, and a deeply-stricken "widow."

Before we reached the burying-ground, the services began with a long-drawn funeral song, that came up to us in snatches. Very mournful and beautiful the tune was, embodying the very spirit of loneliness, sorrow and resignation. As we drew nearer, Mrs. Salyer joined in the refrain, and I caught some of the words,

I'm a long time travelling here below,
A long time travelling away from my home.
A long time travelling here below
To lay this body down!

"A long time travelling" indeed it seems to

those of us bereft as she is, and as I am. The inexpressible sweep, dignity and pathos of the song will haunt me as long as I live.

We joined the crowd among the grave-houses. In front of the newest of these, saplings had been laid across logs to make seats; and the people who could not be accommodated here sat on the ground or walked quietly about. Even the numerous babies were quiet, as if knowing that a funeral occasion demanded it.

The immediate family sat on the front sapling, facing the preachers, who occupied a plank against the grave-house. Mrs. Salyer pointed out Emmeline's bereaved "widow" to me. He sat with drooping head and utterly dejected attitude, while the row of children with him wept. Just at his side was a wholesome-faced young woman, surely too old to be Emmeline's daughter, holding on one arm a child about a year-and-a-half old, and in the other a very pink new baby.

"Who is that?" I inquired.

Mrs. Salyer whispered back, "That's his new woman, Mary,—of course he was bound to get him one right off, with all them young ones. She treats them mighty good, too. The new one's hers,—it come eight days ago, just in time for the funeral occasion."

When the first preacher started to speak, and Emmeline's virtues began to be aired, I saw with interest and surprise that Mary wept as sincerely and heartily as anybody, her tears dropping down impartially upon the nursing baby and the older one. Once, when her husband seemed quite overcome, she laid a pitying hand on his shoulder; at other times, with a corner of her apron she tenderly wiped the eyes and noses of all the children within reach. And when, later, the preacher referred solemnly and unblinkingly to the fact that Emmeline's offsprings had now fell into the hands of a stepmaw, and it behooved her to remember that

she must one day give account to the God of widows and orphans, she bowed her head very humbly, and seemed to be at once overwhelmed and uplifted by the thought of her responsibility. Her face was really wonderful and beautiful, and in it I saw far more hope for the happiness of Emmeline's offsprings than in that of the "widow." In both wives he appears to have received more than his deserts.

The whole scene—the lonely mountain-shoulder, the weather-beaten grave-houses, the isolated little home below, the reds and yellows of the forest fading after a night of heavy frost, the ancient spectacle of human bereavement and sorrow with nothing to relieve it save the look on Mary's face—went to my heart till the tears came.

At four o'clock, having heard five preachers and several funeral songs, we took our departure. The occasion was to last all day Sunday, too. I, however, besought Mrs. Salyer to let the

boys have one day at home, and at last gained her consent; and when we were once more in bed, and conversation had languished, and Ponto was thumping the floor with his tail again, Keats raised his head from the pillow to murmur, sleepily, but rapturously "Gee-oh,—a whole 'nother day at home to-morrow!"

On our arrival at the school to-night after dark, I heard that Nucky had left Friday in spite of my commands, and had not yet returned.

XV

TROUBLE ON TRIGGER AND ELSEWHERE

First Monday, November.

About ten this morning, Nucky came silently into the cottage, got his books, and was starting to the school-house, when I called him into my room.

"Did you go home?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And did Blant send you back?"

"Yes," he said. Then suddenly he flung the books on the floor and burst into furious weeping. "He run me off," he said; "and now there haint nobody to keep lookout for him, and I know he'll be kilt! If I was strong as him, I'd show him whether he could run me off!"

(I judge that Blant had to resort to severe

measures before prevailing upon him to return.)

"When did he send you back?"

"Saturday."

"Where have you been since then?"

"Laying out in the high rocks,—I felt so bad I never cared what become of me. Todd and Dalt will get Blant, I know they will!"

I tried to comfort and cheer the poor child, telling him Rich Tarrant would help Blant, but I myself feel that he has grave cause for anxiety.

Wednesday.

Trouble certainly arrives promptly. A man stopped at the gate this noon and hallooed for Nucky. "War's broke out again on Trigger," he said; "yesterday was election day, and when Blant rid down to the precinct booth to cast his first vote, there was Todd and Dalt a-drinking and a-whooping round like wild, and making their brags he wouldn't dast to put in an ap-

pearance. Of course when he come, it was just a question of the quickest trigger; and Todd had his right elbow put out of business, and Dalt a bullet in his shoulder, before you could bat your eye. Blant he got a trifling flesh-wound in his thigh,—nothing to speak of. He said you would probably hear of the trouble, and not git it straight, and he sont me over to relate to you how it really was, and to tell you to stay right where you air, or you'll see certain trouble,—that he is plenty able to tend to all that comes, and you throwed in; that your maw's desires that you get l'arning has got to be fulfilled though the heavens fall."

Nucky was silent and white for a moment; then he called out savagely, "You tell him I hate him for treating me this way, and I don't mind if he does get kilt!", then, rushing into his room and locking his door, I heard him kick chairs violently about, and then burst into another wild fit of weeping. With his devotion to Blant

turned back upon itself, and his emotions and energies denied their natural outlet, I can see that this is to be a time of great strain and suffering.

Friday.

I am pleased to find that Geordie's blandishments are not invariably successful. The little Salyers brought back with them from home two pairs of stout brogans. Now that November has set in, it is necessary to get all feet covered, —a most difficult proposition, since the friendly barrels hold almost no boys' shoes. Women's shoes have had to be de-heeled and pressed into service; and these of course suffer by comparison with the fine brogans. Yesterday while we were planting onions, I heard snatches of a conversation between Geordie and Hen, in which the word "brogans" played a prominent part. What Geordie's various offers were I could not gather; but, evidently, Hen has an acute mind, and has been cutting eye-teeth in past expe-

riences; for his final answer came out loud and emphatic,

"No, son, I don't want your cow,—your calf's lousy!"

Sunday Night.

With Nucky, moods of deep depression alternate with those of insane daring. Yesterday, looking up from the garden, I was horrified to see him balancing on the roof-tree of the big house, with the slippery, frosty roof slanting steeply down on both sides; and this afternoon on our walk, while the boys played "fox and dogs" and ran like deer over the mountains, I saw the "fox," Nucky, make for the gray rocks and crags that crown the summit of one, and then crawl to the jutting edge of the highest, and hang with his hands from it, out over space. These performances of his cause me acute suffering.

I wonder that mothers have not made a study of the effects of color upon children. My change of dress in the evenings from dark

blue serge to cardinal silk causes an even more pronounced change in the home atmosphere. Red, the color of life, certainly appeals to boys; when I put on the cardinal dress, they love to stroke it with their hands, or to rub their heads against my shoulders as I read.

That beauty also means a great deal more to them than we older people think, I was made to realize when Iry began to tell to-night about the "powerful pretty looks" of his young mother, and how he loved, baby though he was, to "just lay and look at her." He told of one day in particular when he awoke from sleep in her arms before a great, roaring fire, and he and she looked and smiled into each other's eyes for a long, long time, until some strange women came in and interrupted them. It is a singular thing for him to remember—doubtless he and she had gazed into each other's eyes many times, after the manner of mothers and first-born sons—probably the coming of the strange

women fixed this particular incident in his memory.

Later in the evening, when we resumed the adventures of Odysseus, there was a chorus of indignation when the hero permits the monster Scylla to snatch six of his friends from the ship and make a meal of them. "Shut up the book!" "Don't want to hear about no such puke-stocking as him," "Ongrateful's worse'n pizen!" "Why'n't he grab his ax and chop off them six heads when he seed 'em a-coming?" "Any man can't fight for his friends better be dead!" were some of the comments. I bowed to the storm and shut the book, to hear several instances of true friendship related. One was about Blant and Rich Tarrant. During active hostilities on Trigger last winter, Blant was getting out yellow poplar timber from the top of his mountain, almost under the shadow of the "high rocks" on the summit, Richard assisting him. Happening to cast his eyes upward, Richard was

just in time to see the muzzle of a gun projecting over the rocks, and to throw himself in front of Blant and receive the discharge in his own bosom. Had it been an inch farther to the right, it would have pierced his heart. As it was, he made a troublesome recovery.

"That's what I call right friendship," said Nucky; "there haint a minute in the day when him and Blant wouldn't lay down their life for each other, glad."

"Who was it shot the gun?" inquired Philip.

"Oh, Todd. We knowed it later when he went about with his left hand tied up,—Blant fired as the bullet hit Rich, at the hand that held the gun. We Marrses don't do no low-down fighting,—we allus fight in the open. And the Cheevers used to; but Todd is a snake in the grass, and don't stop at nothing."

Thursday.

While at the big house talking with the head-workers yesterday, they showed me some

albums of photographs made in the beginnings of their work here, before the school was even thought of, and when they came up from the Blue Grass only in the summers, and lived in tents, having classes in cooking, sewing, singing, nursing and the like. I turned the pages with eagerness, hearing enthralling tales as I went, and stopped at last before a small picture of strange beauty. In a blaze of firelight, against a dusky log-cabin interior, sat a young mother with a child clasped in her arms. The serene, Madonna-like tenderness of face and attitude made the photograph memorable and surprising.

"Many persons have admired that picture," said one of the heads; "we took it years ago, over on Rakeshin Creek, late one afternoon when, weary from a long tramp, we walked in upon a young mother and her child in the firelight. We spent the night there afterward."

"On Rakeshin!" I exclaimed. "How long ago was it?"

"Eight years, I should say."

"Do you suppose—could it have been, the wife and child of Mr. Atkins?"

"That's exactly who it was," she replied,—"one of his wives, I hardly remember which."

"I know," I said; "it was Iry's mother. And that wonderful child remembers the very hour! Only Sunday he was telling of the long look he and his mother were taking at each other when some strange women came in and interrupted them."

The heads exclaimed with me in wonder and loving interest.

"Give it to me," I said, "so that I may send it off at once to be enlarged for his Christmas present."

Friday.

Very heavy rains for three days, and another big "tide," with seven panels of the back fence washed away, and Perilous a boiling yellow

flood down which logs and whole trees are rushing. What was my horror, on hearing loud cheers from the stable-lot this morning, to see Nucky out in the middle of the torrent, standing calmly on a swift log, which even as I glanced, shot around a curve and out of sight. Ten minutes of agony for me followed; then Nucky reappeared, wet only to the waist, and followed by every boy on the place.

"Gee, that wasn't nothing," he deprecated, in answer to my reproaches, "I've rid logs ever sence I was born. I just jumped on her when she come a-nigh shore, and off again down Perilous a piece. I haint afeared!"

"Haint afeared got his neck broke yesterday," remarked Joab, drily.

These desperate and daring moods of Nucky's are source of untold suffering to me. I know they are caused largely by his worry over Blant, and his baffled desire to be at his post on Trigger. Sometimes I think it would be best

to let him go,—there can be no doubt that Blant does need him, and he is doing little in his studies, and is so bitter and gloomy that I scarcely know my once delightful boy.

XVI

FILIAL PIETY AND CROUP

Saturday Bed-time.

This evening, while we were popping corn in the "fotch-on" poppers, Killis said he could recollect "capping" corn in a skillet under the still while he and his father made liquor.

"You made liquor?" I exclaimed.

"Can't remember when I didn't," he replied; "I holp paw from the time I could walk. I would go with him up the hollow, and gather wood for the fire, and then set and watch the singlings whilst he kep' a lookout for officers. And sometimes he would let me mix the doublings, too. And when the liquor was made, and folks would come to buy it, I would circle round up in the field where it was hid, to show 'em the place, and they would come up with their jugs

and leave the money under a stump. Gee, I knowed so much about the business I could run it myself!"

"I hope and pray you never will," I said, earnestly.

"What you got again' it,—you haint no officer," he said.

"No," I said, "but I think it is wrong." And I gave my reasons, which, however, failed to carry much conviction.

"The marshal that kilt your paw," inquired Nucky, at last, "how long you aim to let him live?"

"Till I'm good and ready for him," replied Killis; "I got a dead tree up the hollow I practice on all the time,—there's a band breast-high around it black with bullet-holes. Sometimes I shoot walking, and sometimes running, and sometimes I fetch a nag up and gallop around and shoot. When I get so I never miss, I'll ride over where he lives at and tell him

"'I got a dead tree up the hollow I practice on all the time.'"

'I'm Steve Blair's boy,' and shoot him down like a dog, and revenge my paw, and do my duty."

A murmur of quiet approval began with Nucky and passed around the circle.

After the other boys went to bed, I finally extracted from Killis a solemn promise not to perform this "duty" before he was eighteen. It was the utmost I could accomplish,—long years of training must do the rest.

Monday.

The first real snow yesterday, and the boys wild in consequence. On our walk up Perilous, they found drifts in which they dived and wallowed. Coming back I noticed that Jason was quite hoarse; and in the middle of the night I was awakened by strange and painful sounds, as if someone were choking to death. The night was cold, the bed warm; I lay and listened a moment longer. Then flinging on wrapper and slippers, I ran across the sitting-room to the

"The first real snow yesterday, and the boys wild in consequence."

upper bedroom. Jason was sitting up in bed, gasping for breath.

"What is the matter with you?" I asked.

"Croup," he croaked, between gasps.

"Did you ever have it before?"

"I follow havin' it."

"Why didn't you tell me it was coming on?"

"Afeared you'd whup me."

I wrung my hands. "Cleo," I called back, "what in the world should be done for croup?"

But for once her resources failed. "Some ties grease around their necks," she said.

I have a maxim, "when in doubt try a hot-water-bag". Desperately stirring the fire in my grate, I put on water, and while it was heating spread vaseline on a handkerchief. Then flying back to Jason, I slapped first the handkerchief, then the hot bag, upon his chest. Apparently the child was choking to death,—I was terribly frightened,—the water may have been a little over-hot. At any rate, between chokes, my

"little pet" raised the most roof-splitting yells. "Take it off! Take it off! Paw he gits me pole-cat-grease!" All the boys jumped out of their beds and came running. Jason fought me like a little tiger; but grabbing him by the hair, I held the bag on with all my might. His yells increased. "Oh, God, she's a-killing me! Oh, God, she's a-burning me up! Oh, God, gimme pole-cat-grease, pole-cat-grease, po—*ole*-cat-grease!" It was an awful moment; but I held my ground and the bag. In a few seconds, which seemed ages, the cries and chokes lessened, the breathing became quieter, the tense little frame relaxed, and danger was past.

Half an hour later, when, weak but safe, my angel child lay quiet on his pillow, Philip, standing over him, remarked philosophically,

"Son, you'd a-waited a right smart spell for pole-cat-grease,—better to lose a patch of your hide than die waiting for that!"

XVII

BLESSINGS AND HATINGS

Thanksgiving Day, Bed-time.

All day my heart has been overflowing with thankfulness; and to-night when I accompanied my sons to the beautiful Thanksgiving party at the big house, where all the young folks from miles around were gathered, and observed their handsome appearance in their Sunday suits and gay new ties, and, still better, their ease of manner, and social graces, my heart swelled with pride almost to bursting. I own to a weakness for pretty looks and pretty ways; and with the exception of Philip, who scorned to play any of the games in which girls had a part, my boys quite satisfied me to-night.

Still later, when we came home and sat

around our fire to talk it over, I in my pink party dress, Nucky and Keats leaning against my shoulders, Jason and Iry with their heads in my lap, the other eight gathered as closely as possible about me, it seemed to me I had reached the point where I could say "My cup runneth over". When was a lonely heart more truly comforted, a forlorn creature snatched from greater desolation to brighter cheer? "Yea, the sparrow hath found her a nest", "Thou has set the desolate in families". Almost a miraculous thing it seems that I should actually have the desire of my heart,—a houseful of children; and, instead of the hideous loneliness I looked forward to a few months ago, the delightful task of bringing up these twelve sons to manhood and good citizenship. Indeed, I often ask myself, what other boys have such gifts to bring to their nation? Proud, self-reliant, the sons of heroes, bred in brave traditions, knowing nothing of the debasing greed

for money, strengthened by a hand-to-hand struggle with nature from their very infancy (I have not one who did not begin at five or six to shoulder such family responsibilities as hoeing corn all summer, tending stock, clearing new ground, grubbing, hunting, gathering the crop), they should bring to the service of their country primal energy of body and spirit, unquenchable valor, and minds untainted by the lust of wealth.

Yes, I know that I am greatly blessed. Children of my own could be no dearer to me, and certainly not half so interesting; and my heart is fed and satisfied. After all, is not motherhood less a thing of the flesh than of the spirit,—indeed, the richest, fairest blossoming known to the human spirit? I believe that if all the sad, lonely, self-centred women in the land could know what joy dwells in my heart to-night, within twenty-four hours orphan asylums would be depopulated, city streets waifless.

Nucky lingered after the others went off to bed, to cover the fire. Then he opened the front door, and stood looking out into the bright moonlight. "These is the nights Blant needs me at home," he said, sighing deeply; "seems like I can't get no peace or rest in my mind for troubling over him." I crossed the room and stood beside Nucky, also looking out. As I gazed, his fear was communicated to me, and the fair moonlight seemed suddenly cruel and chill.

Saturday.

A mail-carrier rides over from Powderhorn way twice a week. This morning, while cleaning was in progress, he stopped at the cottage gate. "I allowed I'd stop and tell you the news from Trigger," he said. "Another battle fit over the fence last night. I have been looking for it ever sence Todd and Dalt come back, knowing they wa'n't bad wounded in the election fight. Blant has been looking for it, too, and him and Rich has took turns keeping watch of a day, and

of moonlight nights. Last night was Blant's watch; but he was powerful tired from logging, and the babe was punier than common, and he had to set up with it longer, and before he knowed it he drapped off to sleep there a-holding it before the fire; and there he sot till he was woke by chilling about eleven. Then he walked out to see how the land lay at the fence; and there was the whole b'iling of Cheevers, with very near all the rails drug off the old boundary, and a-laying 'em on the new. All hands got to work with their guns, and anybody'd a-thought sure they'd finish him, so many ag'in' one; but by good luck all of 'em put together haint got his aim, and atter a few was wounded, they took to their heels and abandoned the field. That 'ere Blant is a pure wonder; but such good luck haint apt to hit twice, and they're bound to git him sooner or later. I hope I may die if he haint the worst handicapped for warfare ever I seed, with a family to

feed, and a whole passel of young uns to be paw and maw to, and the babe pindling all the time, and Rich on yan side the mountain, and his uncle Billy's boys a mile up the branch."

When I turned around to speak to Nucky, who had been just behind me, he was gone. Great as is my anxiety about him, I realize the uselessness of trying to send after him, or to hold him back.

Thursday, first week December.

Nucky returned last night, after nearly a week of absence,—it seems that Blant was glad of his help this time. He says that on Monday they gathered together Rich and his uncle Billy's boys and one or two more, and in broad daylight laid the fence again on the old line, every man working armed, those who drove the mules that dragged the rails walking with guns in position, those who laid the rails doing so with guns tucked under their arms. "I carried my rifle Cap'n Enoch Marrs fit the British

with," said Nucky. But though the Marrs side worked all day at the fence, and the Cheevers must have known what was going on, not one of them appeared. "They have had their fill of fighting Blant in the open," said Nucky; "what they will do now will be to kill him from cover. Todd he won't stop at nothing. And Blant he haint able to look out for hisself with so much to tend to, and needs me there to be eyes for him, especially now, with Christmas coming on, and all the drinking and devilment that is allus done then. But he won't listen to no reason, or let me stay."

"I am sure that Richard Tarrant will be with him day and night," I said, to comfort him.

"Yes; but tha'in't nobody got the eye for a Cheever I got, or can keep watch like me."

I share Nucky's feeling that he ought to be there to be eyes for Blant; at the same time I am inexpressibly thankful that Blant refuses to keep him, and that he is here with me in safety.

XVIII

CHRISTMAS ANTICIPATIONS

Monday.

Already the air is full of Christmas talk and plans. Besides the great tree here in our school for the entire neighborhood, the workers and teachers expect to have seven or eight trees in other localities, thus bringing brightness and cheer and the Christmas story into many sad and colorless lives. I should have been glad to have a tree over on Trigger; but a gathering there in the present state of feeling would be extremely dangerous, and by Nucky's advice, I have abandoned the hope. "I'd like to have you come over," he said; "but Trigger haint no place for women or women's doings now."

Another excitement is the telephone just set

up in our village, connecting us with the railroad and the outside world.—All the boys went down this afternoon to see and hear the marvel.

Wednesday Morning.

I have begun teaching some of the beautiful old English carols to our boys and girls,—it seems peculiarly fitting that these children of pure English stock should sing the carols centuries ago upon the lips of their ancestors. But the task is an uphill one with the boys,—they refuse to take any interest in this or any other Christmas preparation. When I reproached them to-night for their apathy, Philip said,

"Nothing here to take no interest in,—won't be no chance for no Christmas doings till we git away from here."

"But there will be great Christmas doings," I said, "just the very best that can be thought of."

"What,—you women aiming to lay in a store

of liquor and do a lot of shooting?" he asked, with dawning hope.

"Horrors, no!" I exclaimed.

"Them's the good times I allus seed a-Christmas."

"Me, too!" echoed the other eleven.

"Didn't you ever hang up your stocking, or have a tree or get presents?"

"Never heared tell of the like till I come here."

"But it's the greatest possible fun," I insisted.

"Fun enough for women, may be, but men, —gee!"

"Gimme a big jug of moonshine!" shouted Joab.

"And a galloping nag!" cried Nucky.

"And a pistol in both hands!" added Killis.

"Boys," I said, "is it possible you can be willing to spend the holy season of Christmas in drinking and shooting?"

"Only way I ever heared of anybody spending

it," said Philip; "everybody does it. If there's ary boy here," he added, "that haint been drunk, or tried to, every Christmas he can ricollect, hold up your hand!"

Not a hand moved, till suddenly, as if by an afterthought, Killis's went up. "I weren't last Christmas," he said; "when paw got shot and lay a-dying, he told me never to drink another drap, and I haint toch it sence."

"Mighty hard on you," remarked Joab; "I never pass a Christmas without being drunk,—paw he gen'ally fills me'n Iry up till we can't see single, and then makes us walk a crack in the floor, for fun."

"I allus used to swill all I could hold, from New Christmas to Old Christmas," said Killis.

"I drink all I want and then ride around on Blant's nag and shoot off my rifle," said Nucky.

"When I were a five-year-old," contributed Geordie, "my uncles give me a pint of liquor, and then put a cocked pistol in my hand and

p'inted it at Absalom, and told me to shoot. I fired away,—good thing I weren't sober, I'd a-kilt him sure!"

"The neighbors up the branch they invites us to their house and treats us a-Christmas," said Hen; "but Keats he haint half a man,—I can drink twict as much as him!"

"Self-brag is half-scandal," exclaimed Keats, angrily; "it's because I've had white swelling and typhoid I can't drink as much as you, you sorry little scald-pate!"

"Paw and me got so drunk last Christmas we couldn't roll over in bed," piped up Jason.

Taulbee, the great stickler for propriety, summed up the matter authoritatively: "Folks would think they was bad off if they couldn't pass around a jug of liquor a-Christmas," he said; "they would feel like it weren't showing hospitality."

When I remember that this was the idea of the entire Christian world less than a century ago,

I cannot be too severe upon my boys, distressing as these conditions are.

Killis spoke again shortly. "I want every boy here that can get to my house on Clinch a-Christmas to come, and see a good time," he announced. "Come the Saturday after New Christmas. I can't drink myself, on account of what paw said; but I got good-and-plenty for my friends. And maw she'll give you all you can eat. And we'll shoot off all paw's guns and pistols."

There was unanimous acceptance, even by boys living nearly forty miles distant from Killis, Nucky's being qualified by the condition, "If the Cheevers haint giving too much trouble at home."

I sighed deeply. "Boys," I said, "you know what I think about drinking; you know I consider it very, very wrong."

"Quare women has quare notions," remarked Joab, forbearingly.

"You know I hope the day will come when not one of you will ever touch liquor," I said. "Is there one now who thinks enough of me to promise not to drink this Christmas?"

The dead silence that followed was broken at last by Philip. "We like you all right," he said; "but, by grab, a fellow's got to see some fun!"

It is rumored that Killis's uncles still carry on the business in which his father perished; so I suppose there will be no doubt about the "good-and-plenty" to drink at his house.

Sunday, mid-December.

Two birthdays this past week, Philip's thirteenth, Wednesday, and Nucky's twelfth yesterday, and the excitement of having gorgeous birthday cakes at our table, and passing around candles for birthday wishes.

At bed-time last night, Hen came up from the wash-house looking extremely clean as to head and feet. When he was passing into the bed-

room however, I called him back. "What is that dark band just below your nightgown?" I asked.

He made no reply, but stooped so that his gown should fall lower. I lifted the hem to his knees, revealing the fact that the cleanness stopped half-way, and that above that line his legs were more than dingy. "Didn't you wash all over?" I inquired.

"Not quite all."

"How much did you wash?"

"Down to my neck and very near up to my knees. That dag-gone ole gown done shrunk up two inches sence the last time."

"But didn't I tell you you must wash all over every single bath?"

"That was before cold weather sot in. Philip he said down to your neck and up to your knees was a-plenty in cold weather, and all *he* was aiming to do; and it's all any of us boys been a-doing sence November started in."

"You haint never washed as far up as your knees, son," corrected Keats, from superior heights; "you allus stop where your nightgown comes to. I told you she'd ketch you if you done that!"

Summoning all my family, I found the shocking fact to be true that for six weeks not one had bathed any farther than "down to my neck and up to my knees,"—they rather gloried in it, especially Philip, and complained bitterly when made to lose several days' play time, in addition to taking a complete bath instantly, every one, though it was already past bed-time.

Truly my Thanksgiving pride in their beautiful manners and aristocratic appearance has received a severe shock!

XIX

CHRISTMAS AND DANGER

Wednesday Afternoon,
Christmas Day.

No time to catch one's breath for ten days. Now the festivities are over. First came the tree last night. It was an exciting time as all of us, teachers, children, and parents from miles around, dressed in our best, sat waiting, the sole blot on my happiness being that just as the curtain was drawn back, revealing the splendid "spruce-pine" (hemlock) with its gleaming candles, strings of popcorn and hollyberries, and mysterious packages tied and banked around, my Philip, having successfully eluded me beforehand, stepped out on the platform, with a dirty face, tousled hair, soiled shirt,

gallusses fastened by one nail, and a large hole in the seat of his breeches, to hand the gifts to Santa Claus for distribution.

Then, before daylight this morning, came the boys' carols, sung through halls and stairways of the big house, and down through the village street, awakening the valley with the glad tidings; and, finally, the great moment after breakfast, when our resident children were turned into the library, where, on a "fireboard" extended for the occasion across two sides of the room, hung seventy gay stockings. Great was the joy of little and big girls, many of whom had never beheld a doll before, over the pretty "poppets" in the tops of their stockings; great, though quieter, the pleasure of the boys in "store" marbles, balls and knives, not to mention candy and "orange-apples"; but greatest was the happiness of little Iry, the "pure scholar," as, after gazing long and wonderingly at the large picture beneath his stocking, he at

last clasped it rapturously to his heart, crying, "Me'n my maw! I got my maw back ag'in!" I knew he would recognize it!

My own stocking, too, held its treasures,—ten sticks of candy from Nucky, a little poke of brown-sugar and crackers (greatest luxury known to mountain children) from Killis, a walnut penholder from Philip, a fine apple, all the way from Rakeshin, and treasured for weeks for the purpose, from Iry, a red-flannel pincushion from Jason.

Then came the painful moment when I saw my boys scatter to their homes,—even Jason, who has no home, went for a week with Keats and Hen. Again I begged Killis not to get the boys drunk when they visit him Saturday, but he would make no promise. Last of all, and most reluctantly, I bade Nucky goodbye. I fear and dread the events that this Christmas season may bring to pass on Trigger,—with one accord, the boys prophesy "bloody doings"

there. I would keep him back if I could; but nothing can prevent his going.

And now I shall have a much needed rest, and a chance to catch up on magazines and books laid away for five months.

Bed-time.

The day has been ages long,—I cannot read or rest,—the old loneliness is all back upon me again. Why did I let all the boys go? And how am I to face the ten days of their absence? The silence is awful. I would give the world to hear the dozen pairs of shoes come thundering across the little bridge and into the cottage, the shrill voices raised in play or song or even a fight!

Thursday Night.

My joy may be imagined when, as I started to breakfast this morning, I saw Jason come climbing over the big gate. To my pleased inquiries as to the cause of his return, he finally murmured with pretty bashfulness, "I were

homesick for you!" "My darling child!" I cried, hugging him very hard. Then we went to the village and bought all the goodies he felt able to eat; and all day I have sat on the floor playing marbles with him. If I did not have Killis's party, and Nucky's danger to worry over, I should be quite happy. As it is, a sense of foreboding oppresses me. When this evening I saw a splendid moon, almost full, hang over the wooded mountain to the East, my fears were quickened.

Saturday Morning.

All Thursday, yesterday and last night, I worried and could not sleep; and my anxiety has now reached a pitch where I must do, and no longer think. Something terrible hangs over me,—I know not whether it is some casualty to-day at Killis's, consequent upon the drinking and shooting, or something still more dreadful on Trigger Branch. At any rate, there is nothing to prevent my riding over to Clinch, and

then, if I find all well there, going the eight miles farther to Nucky's, and persuading him to return with me if possible. I am just about to set off with Jason.

Sunday Morning,
Killis's Home on Clinch.

We came by way of Nancy's Perilous, passing the Salyer home. Keats was out chopping wood in the snow, and greeted me joyfully. I accepted his invitation to alight for dinner; but before I could get off the nag, he remarked, "I see you got your little pet up behind you,—did he tell you how come him to leave a-Thursday?"

"Yes," I replied, proudly; "he was homesick for me."

Keats measured Jason with his eye. "He's the lyin'est little devil ever I seed," he said; "I'll tell you what made him go. Him and Hiram fit from the time he stepped in the door, and all through supper, and off'n on all night,

and got up before day to start in ag'in; and Hiram he got him down and rid him, and Jason he pult his Christmas knife out of his pocket and jobbed it in Hiram's wrist, and maw she tuck atter him with a hickory, and he run away."

I slid off Mandy, called for another hickory, sternly dragged down my "darling child," and gave him, not only the punishment he escaped on Thursday, but another on my own account; the bitterness of it being doubled for him when all the Salyers, including Hiram, came out to see it well done.

After a hasty dinner, we started on again,—I could not be satisfied to tarry. Dark pictures rose before me all the way,—my dear boys drinking, shooting, maybe killing one another—and I urged Mandy on, scarcely feeling the cold wind that blew down from the snowy mountains.

It was past three when I reached the Blair home. Behind it rose a great hollow, filled with dark hemlocks. I gazed up into it with a shud-

der, remembering it was here that Killis's father died.

Mrs. Blair met me at the door, and in answer to my inquiries for the boys, said, "They've been in and out all day; now they're up the branch shooting."

"Have they been drinking much?" I asked.

"A sight!" she answered; then she continued smiling, "but what they've drank won't hurt 'em much, I reckon. When Killis come home a-Wednesday, he called for several jugs of liquor for the boys a-Saturday; and I told him all right, for I don't never deny him nothing. But next day 'peared like he was thoughtful in his mind, and come evening, he said if he had something that weren't pure liquor, but would just sort of cheer the boys, he would give 'em that, to please you. And I recollected there was a barrel of cider left. So this morning, before they come, he drawed off a kag of that, and being as it was pretty hard, poured in a couple of gallon

of water, so's they wouldn't get *too* cheered; and all day they been eating and drinking fit to burst, and then running out to shoot a while, and then filling up ag'in."

"Anybody wounded?" I asked.

"None so far."

Relieved beyond expression, I sank into a chair and gave thanks to God. A little later, Killis ran in the front door. "I never give them boys nary drap but cider," he said; "I done it to please you!"

I threw my arms around him; yes, I even wept.

"And I watered the cider, too," he continued; "them boys thinks they are drunk, and seeing a right Christmas, but they haint, but it does 'em just as much good!"

The other boys followed;—all mine but Nucky, the Salyers and the Atkinses were there, and some neighbor boys—piling up guns and pistols on the beds, and taking another

round of pies and cider. Finding they were not at all abashed to see me, I accepted pressing invitations to spend the night, and we had a cheerful evening, with picking and singing, until Philip, who has been visiting a boy friend on Powderhorn, roused all my premonitions again by saying,

"I went up Trigger to fetch Trojan; but he couldn't come. He said Todd and Dalt had give it out they would certainly take the fence and grease their boots with Blant's brains before Christmas was over; and him and Rich was a-keeping lookout every minute."

All my fears leaped into being again instantly. If I could, I would have started for Trigger then and there. I cannot say how sinister the bright moonlight appeared to me as it streamed in through chinks in the logs during the night. This morning my panic seems excessive; still I am going to Trigger at once with Philip to guide me.

XX

WAR AND WORSE ON TRIGGER

Monday Noon.

Let me try to tell, if I can do so, the tale of these dreadful twenty-four hours. We crossed over a high gap and down into the head-waters of Powderhorn, and thence to the mouth of Trigger. Just as we reached it, a man riding down looked intently at me. "You are one of them school-women, haint you?" he inquired. I recognized him as Saxby, Blant's neighbor who brought Nucky word of the election fight, and replied, "Yes."

"I seed you when I was over," he continued. "I allow by your being here you have heared the news from Trigger."

"What news?" I asked.

"Another engagement last night,—I hate to tell you the rest."

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Ever sence Blant defeated them at the fence a month gone, the Cheever boys has been dogging his footsteps in secret, trying to git him unbeknownst and unexpected. Though he haint seed hair nor hide of 'em, two or three times bullets has whizzed by him when he was doing chores round the house, or feeding the property. Of course he haint let the little chap, Nucky, know nothing about it, and has stayed in and laid low all he could, letting Rich tend to outside things for him. As Christmas come on, Todd and Dalt got so deep in liquor they couldn't keep their tongues from wagging, and they have bragged far and nigh that they would both take the fence and grease their boots with Blant's brains, before Christmas was over. So a' extry watch has been kept at both house and fence, and the little chap, Nucky, he

has been hard at it. Last night when the full moon riz about seven, he was in the clump of spruce-pine on the p'int with his great-grandpaw's gun he allus packs around, when the whole b'iling of Cheevers, nine or ten, marched out to the fence. Just what happened, we haint got no means of knowing; but instid of obeying orders, and running to the house to tell Blant and Rich, like he ought, the boy he committed plumb suicide by opening fire on 'em from the tree. Of course before he could drap to the ground, seven or eight of 'em had blazed away in his direction; and when Blant and Rich heared the shots and come a-running, the little chap was a-laying limp and dead, and the Cheevers running round confused-like, carrying off one wounded. Blant he rushed on 'em like a robbed she-bear, routing 'em in no time,—Rich said such shooting never was seed on earth. I heared the noise acrost the branch where I live at, and come a-running. When we turnt

"'Blant he rushed on 'em like a robbed she-bear, routing 'em in no time.'"

the little chap over, we found he was bleeding from several flesh wounds, which we tied up; but then we also seed his skull was broke and stove in by another bullet, and knowed there wa'n't no hope. We tuck him to the house, and sot there all night keeping the death-watch, and looking for every breath to be his last."

"Then he still does breathe?" I asked, fiercely.

"Yes, a little-grain; but he don't know nothing, and of course there haint no possible chance, with his skull broke. I'm a-riding now to inform his maw's kin down Powderhorn."

I laid the whip to Mandy, who, startled, sprang forward in a gallop. The twenty minutes before I reached the Marrs home seemed endless. I believed I had already suffered all that a woman could; but that was before I knew the love of a mother for her child.

I ran into the house, pushing away the people gathered there, and laid my hand on the bosom

of the small body lying there so limp and still. The heart was beating, feebly but steadily. "He is not dead!" I cried, "and he shall not die!"

Blant, sitting crouched by the bed, head in hands, raised up and stared at me; Mr. Marrs lifted a bandage from Nucky's head, showing a wound from which a piece of bone protruded, and shook his head hopelessly.

"But the bullet can't have gone in, or he would have died instantly," I said; "it must have broken the skull and glanced off, leaving the bone pressing against the brain."

"Even so, nobody can't live with their skull broke," he replied.

"But they can,—they do! A broken skull may be lifted, trephined, by a good surgeon,—many a life is saved thus nowadays."

"Haint no surgeons in this country," said Mr. Marrs; "what few scattering doctors there is don't follow carving."

"But the new telephone!" I cried. "There is a telephone now from our village to the railroad,—we can get word to a surgeon in the Blue Grass in a few hours; by hard riding he can be here inside of two days. If we can only keep the child alive until then, his life may be saved!"

Blant sprang to his feet, hope transfiguring his haggard face. "Tell me what to do," he said.

"Saddle your best nag for Philip, and let him ride to the school and tell the nurse to telephone for the best surgeon in the state, and that we shall bring Nucky to the hospital to-night on a stretcher."

Philip dashed off, and the rest of us went to work to make a stretcher, with two poles and plenty of warm blankets. I know little about these matters, but I believed that the child could be taken easily and safely across the mountains, by relays of men, and that if I could once get him to the trained nurse she would manage to keep life in him.

Then Blant fed us; and about two o'clock we set forth down Trigger, Blant, Rich and two others bearing the stretcher, and four more young men going along to relieve them every half-hour.

As we went slowly down Trigger, we saw a crowd gathered at Israel Cheever's home, too. "Dalt is bad wounded by the little chap's rifle," said one of "Uncle Billy's boys", "I wisht it had been Todd."

When the stretcher changed hands, we carefully examined Nucky for any change in pulse or temperature. There was none.

Nearly six hours the march lasted,—the way was rough, the snow and ice made the footing uncertain, the evening hours before the moon rose were dark. At last we made the last turn, and came in sight of the school and the village beyond. Rich Tarrant then laid a hand on Blant's arm.

"Right here is where you take a back track,

Blant," he said, firmly; "it haint sensible for you to walk right spang into the teeth of the sheriff and the jail,—you can't afford to lose no time that way, your family not being able to do without you."

"That's so," said Blant, "I plumb forgot. Seems like I can't stand to leave the little chap, though."

"You got it to do. He'll be took good care of. You follow the ridges back."

Blant laid a large, tender hand on Nucky's head, and without a word, turned and struck straight up the nearest mountain, Rich watching till he was out of sight.

"That boy certainly sees more than his fill of trouble," he sighed; "I wisht I could help him more,—I would glad lay down my life for him."

"You proved that last winter," I said, remembering the bullet he took in his breast.

"Oh, that wa'n't nothing at all," he deprecated.

Sure enough, when we reached the hospital, there in the crowd of people who had heard of our coming and gathered to meet us, was the sheriff.

And now Nucky is safe in the nurse's care, his wounds properly dressed, and all means being used to keep life in him, the surgeon is on the way, and if he can live until to-morrow, he may be saved. I can only watch and pray.

XXI

SUSPENSE

Wednesday Morning.

The best surgeon in the state arrived at noon yesterday, performed the trephining at once, and having done all that skill and science could, started back on his long horseback ride. Nucky continued in the deep sleep from which he might pass into either life or death. All afternoon, and into the night, we watched in vain for signs of returning consciousness. About ten, the door opened noiselessly, and Blant and Rich stepped in out of the night. Two hours later, Nucky's head began to move from side to side, and he moaned occasionally. A little past one, he suddenly opened his eyes and looked at Blant.

"They never got you, did they?" he asked, feebly.

"Who, son?"

"Todd and Dalt; they was fixing to layway you when I fired on them."

"Is that what made you disobey orders?" inquired Blant.

"Yes. The whole bunch of Cheevers come up to the fence, and started to throw down rails; and I was just about to drap down and fetch you the word, when I heared Todd tell the rest to make all the noise they could, so's to tole you out, and him and Dalt would hide in the trees and shoot you as you passed. And then they clim the fence and made for the very spruce-pines where I was at. I knowed I couldn't get away then to warn you, so I done my best to shoot 'em."

Blant's face darkened, but his voice was gentleness itself as he said, "You done wise, son; and you certainly hit your mark, too, —they was carrying off Dalt when I got down."

Nucky sighed, deeply, happily, closing his eyes.

After a while he opened them again to say, "I allow they shot me up a little too, by these here rags on my head."

"Oh, a trifle, yes,—but none to hurt,—you wa' n't born to die by no Cheever lead."

"Gee, no," breathed Nucky, in quiet scorn.

"We brung you over here to the women, where you could get well sooner," continued Blant, in his gentle, reassuring voice; "and now since you are doing so fine, I reckon I'll leave you a spell and get along home,—the babe is punier than usual."

"Yes, I don't want you to stay here and get arrested," said Nucky; "but I don't want you to go back there neither. You keep a constant watch on Todd,—I wish it was him I had shot."

Rich and I followed Blant out. Not until we stood out in the snow did we wring one another's hands in speechless relief.

"'I allow they shot me up a little too by these here rags on my head.'"

"Of course he will live now," I said.

To-day Nucky is entirely rational, though quite weak. Only the nurse sees him. Killis, Taulbee, Keats, Hosea and Joab came in for news of him to-day, returning immediately on their long walks.

Friday.

I was permitted to visit Nucky to-day. He is still forbidden to talk, but he smiled his old bright smile, and I read Pilgrim's Progress to him until he fell asleep.

Sunday Morning.

All the boys came back to school yesterday from their vacation, several with gifts for me,—a dozen eggs from the little Salyers, a fine ground-hog-hide from Joab ("it'll make you shoe-strings enough to last a lifetime," he said), a handsome hen from Taulbee, four huge sweet-potatoes from Hosea, and an elegant green glass breastpin from Geordie. Of course the one topic of conversation last night was "Trojan"

and his performance, in which they take endless pride. "I allow Basil Beaumont will sure make up a song-ballad about him now," said Absalom.

They also brought the news that Dalt Cheever is probably "aiming to live",—thank heaven if it is true, for I cannot bear that Nucky's hands should be stained with human blood. Doubtless, however, it will be a keen disappointment to him.

Monday.

As I was about to leave the cottage for the hospital last night after supper, the boys were all bewailing the fact that they had not been able to stay at home over Old Christmas. I asked them what they meant by "Old Christmas."

"You brought-on women," said Taulbee, "thinks New Christmas is real Christmas; but it haint. Real Christmas comes to-morrow, on the sixth of January; and to-night is right Christmas Eve."

"What makes you think so?"

"All the old folks says so, for one thing, and they knows better than young ones; and the plants and the beasts knows better still. To-night's the night when the elder blossoms out at midnight, and the cattle kneels down and prays,—anybody can hear 'em a-lowing and mowing if they stay awake to listen."

I have a hazy recollection of the English calendar having been changed and set forward eleven days in the middle of the eighteenth century, and of the mass of the people in England and the colonies refusing to accept the new date for Christmas. This survival in the mountain country is indeed remarkable.

I sat keeping watch beside Nucky when the clock struck midnight, and got up and went to the window to look and listen. If, in the wintry moonlight, any gaunt, bare stalks put forth miraculous blossoms above the snow, or if reverent cattle knelt and lowed loving welcome

to their Lord, my eyes and ears were holden that I did not see and hear; but I know that it was Real Christmas in my heart as I turned back and saw my child breathing quietly on his bed, a faint color in his pale cheeks again.

Wednesday.

Another visit from Blant to Nucky last night. In reply to eager questions, Blant gave Nucky a very encouraging account of the state of affairs on Trigger. "Never seed things quieter," he said; "it looks like your shot had settled 'em a while. The talk now is that Dalt will likely get well, which I allow you will grieve to hear." A shade of heavy disappointment immediately fell upon Nucky's countenance. "But," continued Blant, " it is good news to me,—I don't like the notion of your having to start in killing at your age."

After we were out on the porch, Blant repeated to me, "Yes, I am proud to know the

little chap haint got blood on his hands yet awhile. You may think it quare, but it really goes again' the grain with me to see a man kilt, even when he needs killing."

"Is it true," I questioned him as he stepped out into the snow, "that things are so quiet on Trigger?"

He smiled slightly. "Oh yes," he said; "quiet enough,—in fact, they are quiet as death,—not a speck of trouble in plain sight nowhere. But I got a bullet through my hat Friday night as I crossed the passage from the kitchen to t'other house, and heared another whiz nigh while I watered the nags yesterday evening. It all happens along towards dark."

"This is horrible," I said.

"Yes, it's low-down. Folks ought to fight in the open if they got any fighting to do."

"Is Richard staying with you?"

"Day and night. I allow he's setting with

the babe this minute. All I'm afeared of is that they will shoot him in place of me. But we keep all the windows blanketed and chinks stopped of a night."

XXII

THE EECH, AND TRAGEDY

Thursday.

Ever since Philip's return he has been scratching himself in the most annoying manner. Before I started for the hospital to-night, he came into my room, clawing viciously at his ankles. "Gimme something for the eech," he said.

"For what?" I asked.

"For the eech,—I knowed I'd ketch it when I seed Dewey Lovel pawing round so them nights I spent with him."

"Do you mean the itch?" I inquired, sharply.

"No, I mean the eech,—the seven-year-eech I reckon this is, by the way it feels."

"I have no idea what to do for such a disease as the itch!" I replied, helplessly.

Philip danced on one foot, clawing his arms

now. "'Itch',—listen at that now, boys,—she calls the eech the itch,—don't know no better,—ha! ha!"

"What do people do for it?" I asked.

"Some rubs on lard-and-sulphur; and some axle-grease."

"I'll ask the nurse for medicine,—go along now, please,—*don't* stand so near me!"

"Get enough for three," was his parting remark, "Taulbee and Hose is beginning to scratch too!"

Yes, get enough for a dozen, he had better say!

Saturday, P. M.

This afternoon bows and spikes (arrows) became violently the fashion. All the boys went up the mountain side to get hickory limbs for bows, and arrowwood for "spikes". But from Geordie alone can be bought the horse-shoe nails (Hosea's before popgun time) which, when hammered flat at the head, shaped around a

nail, and then fitted on the end of a spike, make a truly dangerous and desirable weapon. These nails are held at five cents apiece; but when the buyer has no money, as usually happens, the set of marbles received in his Christmas stocking is acceptable. As Keats says, what good are "marvles" anyway, with the ground either snow or slush all the time?

Sunday Morning.

My fears are verified. Every boy on the place is scratching; and I too have an irresistible impulse in that direction.

Sunday Night.

All my family in quarantine with the itch, and I myself experiencing all the agonies. I think it is King James who says, "The Itch is a disease well worth the having, for the satisfaction afforded by scratching"; but I am forced to dissent from the royal opinion. And the cure,—the being swathed for days in lard-and-sulphur—is almost as bad as the disease. Worst of all is

the thought that for a week I shall not see Nucky.

Sunday, a week later.

The boys and I were released from quarantine to-day, and I ran to the hospital the first thing. Nucky looks much better, and is gaining strength at a normal rate. He is much troubled, however, because Blant has not been to see him again. "I know things is wrong on Trigger,—I am afeared Todd is at his devilment again," he said.

I left after promising to spend the afternoon with him, and went with the other boys to church. Geordie and Hosea were late dressing, and were left to follow. What was my astonishment, when they did walk in, to see Geordie wearing Hosea's fine new overcoat he brought from home after Christmas,—a coat spun, dyed, woven and made by his mother. Hosea wore the shiny, too-large one which we had given Geordie from the barrels. During service

Geordie, with hair plastered down and eyes on the ceiling, sang hymns more loudly than ever.

"Why do you wear Hosea's overcoat?" I demanded, as soon as we were out in the road.

"Him and me's swapped," he replied, carefully avoiding the word "traded"; "I never wanted to do it, did I, Hose?"

"Why was it done, then,—you seem to have decidedly the best of the bargain."

"You haint seed the boot he got," replied Geordie, calmly. "Show her that 'ere watch and chain, Hose."

Hosea drew from his pocket a battered nickel watch, which Geordie held toward me with the air of a connoisseur. "That 'ere's a three-dollar-and-ninety-five-cent watch," he said; "I got it a-Christmas on Bald Eagle, off of Johnny Miles, that just come home from the Penitentiary."

"Did you pay him that much for it?"

"No'm,—he was offering it around for that,—I got it a little-grain cheaper."

"How much cheaper?"

"Well, I paid him forty cents spot-cash for it,—he was a-needing money."

"And you call that a fair trade,—your old worn coat and a forty-cent watch for his nice new coat his mother made?"

"It's a three-dollar-and-ninety-five-cent watch, Miss Loring," Geordie repeated, patiently: "*And*, been in the Penitentiary!"

This failing to enhance its value in my eyes, he added, "And that haint all,—just cast your eye on that chain!"

The chain was a flimsy affair of two brass wires, on which were strung at intervals three battered objects which I at last recognized as dice. "Them 'ere," said Geordie impressively, "is able to make a living for a man all by theirselves. I seed Johnny Miles make a dollar'n' a quarter in five minutes, a-flingin' 'em. And

when Hose heared about it, he said he were bound to have 'em. And thaint nary nother boy on Perilous I'd a-*let* have 'em; but Hose he's such a *good* boy, and so peaceable, and never does no meanness, and allus minds you, and knows his books, and gits up in time of a morning, I felt like I *ought* to prosper him if I could. So I told him all right, to take them dice and buy him a hundred overcoats if he wanted!"

"How did you come to part with them if they are so valuable?"

"Oh, I got t'other set Johnny sold me," replied Geordie, comfortably, "I aim to quit trading now, like you want,—yes, I give you my hand I haint going to trade nary nother time! And I writ maw last night I seed my way clear now to come to Virginia this summer, and see her and the world, and ride on the railroad train!"

These rosy anticipations were cruelly shat-

tered. "Give me those dice at once," I said, "You and Hosea may not know that throwing dice is gambling, and that gambling of any kind is strictly forbidden in this school. Trade back those overcoats at once. And never again let me hear of your associating with Johnny Miles!"

Wednesday.

Terrible news indeed from Trigger. On my way to the garden after school this afternoon, I saw all the boys running toward the front fence, where a man on a nag was talking and gesticulating. I recognized Blant's neighbor Saxby, who had brought bad news before. When I reached the fence he began his tale all over again.

During the two weeks since Blant's last visit here, it appears that Todd Cheever has continued to haunt the Marrs premises at night, lurking in dark places, and making further attempts to shoot Blant. The strain of the constant watchfulness has been great for both

Blant and Rich,—indeed, the feeling that one is being watched from the darkness by the eyes of hate is probably the most terrible one a human being can know.

Blant's nervousness has been augmented by the fact that for three days handrunning he has had visions which have filled him with fear for Rich. Monday while they were together "snaking" logs down the mountain side, he suddenly saw Rich standing beside him headless,—a second glance showed him Rich fastening a log-chain thirty feet distant. Tuesday morning he beheld the headless shade at his elbow, while Rich was on the far side of a fodder-stack from him; and about noon, the same dreadful apparition started up beside him as he lifted a skillet of meat from the fire, Rich being at the time on his way to catch a brief glimpse of his people at home. Blant was in an agony until Rich returned safely about four o'clock; then he told him of the warnings he

had had, and implored him to be exceedingly wary and careful, Rich being quite amused at his earnestness.

After supper they were all gathered as usual about the fire, Blant holding the babe, when there was a halloo from the road. "Don't pay no attention to it," said Rich, "it's likely Todd, trying to tole you out." But the call sounded again, in an unmistakably strange voice, and, handing the babe to his father, Blant started for the door. Rich sprang ahead of him. "If anybody goes, it'll be me," he said. Blant forcibly put him back. "You don't set foot outside this house to-night," he declared, "not after the visions I have seed." Then, taking his forty-five from his pocket, he passed out of the door and into the open passageway.

"I want to inquire how much further on it is to Billy Marrs's," called the strange voice from the road.

"Something over a mile," replied Blant.

At the same instant, as Blant had probably anticipated, a man dashed into the passage from the rear, firing, closely followed by a second, also firing. Conjecturing at once that Todd had hired some stranger to call him out, in order that he and a confederate might attack him, Blant took instant deadly aim at both the men. The first—Todd—fell face forward into the light from the doorway; the second, with the cry, "It's me, Blant," also staggered forward a few steps, and Blant caught the dying Rich in his arms. Guessing Todd's whereabouts, Rich, disobeying commands, had jumped from the window to attack him from the rear, and had thoughtlessly exposed himself to Blant's deadly aim.

Saxby said that Blant, in an agony, had lifted his friend, dashed water over him, worked for hours to restore him, refused to admit that he could be dead; and finally, when compelled to abandon hope, had laid the revolver to his own

"Blant caught the dying Rich in his arms."

temple and fired, his father knocking it up in time to produce only a scalp wound, and Saxby and others who had come in overpowering him and taking it from him before he could fire again. They stood guard over him the rest of the night, while he raved over Rich's body. "Never did I see the likes of the love of them two boys," said Saxby, with tears in his eyes. "And Blant in gineral so quiet,—nobody'd a-dreamed he could keer so deep."

Then, with the coming of daylight, Blant had called for his nag and had announced his determination to give himself up to the sheriff. "Since I haint permitted to kill myself, the law must kill me," he had declared, "for this misery is more than I can endure and live." In vain all tried to dissuade him; he was adamant. "So the whole passel of us come over with him," said Saxby. "Him and t'others stopped up here at the sheriff's, but I come ahead to fetch the news to the little Marrs chap."

"Never!" I said, "it might kill him, now. He must not know a word of it."

"I allowed it might holp him up some to hear Todd was safe dead," he apologized.

"He must hear nothing," I said.

Fifteen minutes later, a sad cavalcade came down the road. There were a dozen or more men, and last of all, between the sheriff and deputy, rode Blant, his face rigid with misery and horror. Pale, deathlike, unseeing, he rode. When I ran out in the road to give him a word of sympathy he looked straight through me, never seeing me. My boys and a gathering crowd followed in awed silence to the jail.

XXIII

DESPAIR, AND BUDDING ROMANCE

Thursday Evening.

I went to the jail to see Blant this morning,—but was almost sorry that I did so. He sits there in his cell, speechless, despairing, refusing food or rest, hearing and seeing nothing. In vain the jail-keeper and I attempted to talk to him and tell him he must not reproach himself so bitterly, or give way to such utter despair, since he was in no way to blame for the death of his friend. He looked agonizingly beyond us, evidently not conscious that we were talking.

The worst of it is that circuit court will not sit here again until early April,—two and a half months, and his suffering must be cruelly protracted.

After this visit it was almost impossible for me to go in and talk and read cheerfully to Nucky, and make plausible excuses for Blant's non-appearance, which is worrying him a great deal.

"I had news from Trigger yesterday," I told him, "Todd has gone away, so there will probably be peace for a long while."

"Where has he gone to?" he asked.

"I am unable to say," I replied.

Monday.

Blant continues to refuse all food, and to maintain his terrible silence. He sits with his head in his hands all day long, oblivious of everything around him. The kind-hearted keeper stays in his cell with him at night. "I know he haint in no fix to stand lonesomeness," he said to me to-day; "even if he don't pay no attention to me, I allow it's some comfort to him to have a human nigh." Then he added, "If he haint able to speak out his grief before long, it's

liable to strike in and kill him. Something ought to be done to rouse him."

"What?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't rightly know. But he's turnt loose all holts on life; something to grapple him to it again is needed."

Knowing their love for each other, my first thought of course was to bring Nucky; but the terrible story could have only disastrous effects upon him at present, so that is not to be considered.

Thursday.

The mail-carrier stopped at the gate yesterday to say, "I hear tell that Blant haint toch a morsel of vittles sence he shot Rich. Neither has the babe, sence he left it, to speak of,—the pore little creetur just whimps and pines for him continual, and won't scacely tech the food its pap gives it. Minervy Saxby's been over trying to peaceify it,—but in vain. It was allus purely silly about Blant, allowing he's its maw. When

a babe gits its mind sot thataway on a proposition, there haint no help for it but to give it what it craves. It's likely to pine away if you don't."

I did not tell Blant of this when I stopped by the jail this afternoon,—I hope it will not reach him, as it could only add to his misery. I was thankful when I arrived to find him out in the common room, where all the prisoners stay during the day, even though he sat in a corner and did not seem to see the others.

The keeper followed me out again, and talked a while on the steps. "I got Blant started on a few vittles to-day, after nine days of starving," he said. "The way I done it was to make out I thought he was trying to cheat the gallows. Then he called for meat and bread. 'Pears like the gallows is the onliest prospect he is able to take any comfort in, and I hold it before him constant, to sort of keep his sperrits up. Though God knows I'm a-acting the black

hypocrite when I do it, when there haint the least grain of a show for him to get a death sentence. There's a strong prejudyce again' hanging in this country,—not a jury ever set in this court-house that pronounced a death sentence,—Blant would a-knowed it if he had stopped to think. But even if the prejudyce didn't exist, why Blaint haint done nothing to earn the gallows,—you might say he haint done anything for the law to take hold of. Of course everybody knows his shooting of Rich was the worst kind of accident; and as for the Cheevers he has killed and maimed, why, that war is really a family affair, which the law haint got no business to meddle with. Public sentiment is again' the law mixing up in affairs like that, and that's the reason why no great effort haint been made to arrest Blant before now. Folks has knowed he meant well, and was hard placed, and let it go at that. Now he's throwed hisself into the very jaws of the law, however, it may

feel compelled to do something; but of course it won't be nothing like no death sentence. But I haven't got the heart to tell him so,—no, I really have not,—I believe he would dash his brains out again' the wall if I did."

Nucky was more insistent this afternoon when I read to him (he is sitting up now and begins to look like himself). "I know pine-blank something is wrong on Trigger, or Blant would have been here," he said, anxiously.

"Nothing is wrong there, except that the babe is ailing," I said, "the mail-carrier told me yesterday she was far from well."

First Sunday, February.

I should be quite weighed down by the Marrs troubles if it were not for the cheerful society of the boys, whose lively and funny doings afford some escape from tragic and depressing thoughts. This morning before church, when I was making the usual round of the ears with soap and wash-rag, to my utter amazement I found Philip's

clean, inside and out, behind and before. At first stricken dumb by the discovery—for I long since abandoned the hope of reforming him in the matters of chivalry and cleanliness—I finally inquired what was the matter.

"Nothing, I just kep' a-digging," was his careless reply.

To-night, however, when everybody was undressing, Hen slid noiselessly into my room, mysteriously shutting the door behind him. Half clothed, I dived into my closet, soon emerging in my wrapper. Hen himself was in trousers and undershirt, with dangling gallusses. Planting himself on the hearth, back to the fire, he held up first one bare foot, then the other, to the blaze, and at last spoke in a confidential tone:

"Philip lied to you this morning when he said there wa'n't nothing the matter with him. He knows what made him wash his years, and *I* know."

"What was it?" I inquired, drawing up the rocker.

"He's a-courting, that's what's the matter."

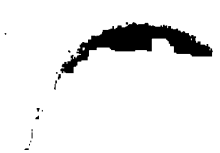
"Courting!" I exclaimed, incredulously.

"Yes, courting, by grab! You mind Dilsey Warrick, that 'ere little tow-head come in atter Christmas, from over on Wace?"

Yes, I remembered Dilsey,—a demure dove of a child, in blue home-spun dress and red yarn stockings, with long, fair hair hanging in two plaits, and the face of an austere little saint. She is at least three years older and a head taller than Hen, but it pleases him to speak of the sex in diminutives.

"You know I pack water to the big house of a morning before breakfast," he continued; "well, Dilsey she sweeps off the front porch over yander then, and Philip *he* goes round and mends the fence where the hogs breaks in of a night."

I groaned an assent,—the neighborhood hogs



are badly on the rampage, after our mustard- and turnip-greens, which show temptingly when the snow melts; and the fence is so frail it gives way constantly to their assaults.

"Well," proceeded Hen, "that's as good a chanct as he wants, when thaint nobody much around but me. But I keep my eye on him,—I tip round the corner of the house right easy, and come up on 'em unexpected."

"You are certainly mistaken about Philip," I said decidedly, "why, he despises girls, has no earthly use for them, in fact."

"Dag gone *me*, he's got use enough for little Dilsey, by Ned! Gee, I never see the beat! He sot in a-courting her the day he got out from eech, and haint stopped to ketch his breath sence. Dad swinge my hide if that 'ere boy haint been nailing planks on that front fence with lee-tle-bitty fourpenny nails, so's the hogs'll root 'em off sure every night, and he'll git to work there and talk to Dilsey of a morning!

"'Dag gone *me*, he's got use enough for little Dilsey, by Ned!'"

I been keeping my eye peeled for him ever sence I seed him give her a' apple one day at recess,—I knowed then something had happened to him!"

I sat speechless.

"But what made him wash his years," continued Hen, with lowered voice and another glance at the door; "one morning whilst Dilsey was a-sweeping, here come Philip along, a-swinging his hammer and nail-box. He put his hand in his pocket and pult out a candy cane I had seed him a-eating on the night before,—one of these-here they fotch on at the store for Christmas—and poked it at Dilsey. 'Have some,' he says, 'eat it all, if you want.' Dilsey she put out her hand for it, and then she tuck a hard look at it, and then at Philip, and says she's obleeged, but she don't believe she wants any. Philip he shoved it ag'in' her face. 'Don't be afeared,' he says, 'I'd ruther you'd have it as anybody'. Little Dilse she said no thanks, she

wouldn't choose any (dag gone if she haint the ladyest girl ever I heared talk!); and Philip axed her what's the reason. But she just kep' a-sweeping, and wouldn't open her mouth. Then Philip he grabbed her by the shoulder, and says, by Heck, she's *got* to tell. And Dilse she shuck him off proud-like, and says, 'Well, if you *bound* to hear it, I don't crave to eat atter no boy that don't never wash his years!' Then Philip he was b'iling (dad burn if I'd take any such talk from any woman!), and he says, 'I bet they clean as yourn!'; and Dilsey she frowned and spoke up solemn, 'I'd have you know, Mister Philip Floyd, *my* years gits washed every day I live!', and made for the door. And Philip he seed me behind the post and give me as much candy cane as I could bite off not to tell nobody what she said to him. And for two days he sulled, and never come anigh her mornings, and mended the back fence. Then when his bath night come, he turnt in and pintly scrubbed the

hide off his years, in and out, and went back to mending the front fence next morning; and him and Dilse made up; and he allus gives her new sticks of candy now; and don't you never let on I told you, less'n you want to see me kilt!"

XXIV

THE BABE

Monday.

On my way to the hospital this morning, I stopped at the weaving-house to see more of the little girl who can work such wonders with Philip. After careful scrutiny of, and conversation with the pretty, dignified child at the loom, I understood something of her power. She has the look of the ideal woman, suggesting many beautiful and elusive things, and judging from her perfect manners, might have been reared in marble halls instead of in a two-room log house on the head of Wace. She has distinctly the look of race,—and her name, how it carries one back through centuries of English history! If the magnificent earl, "proud setter-up and plucker-down of kings" were

himself her ancestor, he could feel nothing but pride in this fair little shoot of his noble tree.

Before I went into the jail to see Blant after dinner, the keeper told me of a touching and remarkable thing. Old Mrs. Tarrant, Rich's mother, rode over yesterday to tell Blant that, although he had darkened the light of the sun-ball for her, she freely forgave him, and hoped he would forgive himself,—that she knew this would be Rich's message to him if he could speak. Her words should have comforted him some; and when I went in, it seemed to me that his face, though infinitely sad, was more at peace.

Tuesday.

The nurse told me this morning that Nucky would be permitted to leave the hospital and return to the cottage to-night; and I realized that the time had come when I could no longer keep from him the sad occurrences on Trigger. So after dinner, taking his hands in mine, I told

him the dreadful tale. He heard it with a white face, expressing neither joy over Todd's death, nor sorrow over Rich's (these Marrses seem to have abnormal powers of emotional repression), and only said, "I'll go right down to Blant."

"Yes, do," I said, "the sight of you may be just what he needs."

On his return to the cottage after supper, "Trojan" was loudly and joyfully welcomed by the other boys; but grief and anxiety were plainly written on his face, he had little to say, and seemed much older.

Friday.

At noon yesterday Philip came in clamoring for a patch for his elbow,—formerly he would have died rather than sew on a patch. I was not surprised to hear from Hen later that he "had heared Dilsey tell Philip at recess she couldn't abide raggeddy boys". And this morning when Philip burst into my room with the demand, "Gimme a latch-pin", and after some pondering

I handed him out a safety-pin, with which he proceeded to join together his sundered gallusses and trousers, Hen, who was making my bed, contributed, "She tolt him before breakfast she never had no respects for folks that went about with their clothes a-drapping off 'em!"

Oh that all my twelve would fall in love!

Monday.

This morning, after a brief reign, bows and spikes went out, and "stilks" came in. Geordie, who now has the stable-job, had a number of superior dogwood limbs laid away under the gear-room, ready to be sold. Looking back, I realize that, with the exception of the old stand-by, shinny, not a single game has come in during the term without his connivance. Indeed, the born trader's ability in supplying a demand is exceeded only by his genius in creating it.

Every day Nucky goes down to see Blant,

always returning sad, thoughtful and troubled. "'Pears like he haint able to take no more interest in nothing, now Rich is gone," he said to me last night; "when he talks he don't say nothing but 'I have killed the friend of my bosom,—my heart is broke,—I can't stand to live no longer.'"

Wednesday.

I stopped the mail-boy again to-day, for news of the Marrs family. "Things is going mighty bad," he said. "The babe is pindling scandlous, and its paw is wore to a frazzle tending it of nights, and cooking, and troubling in his mind. Minervy Saxby allows if Blant don't git back to that 'ere babe, it'll purely pine to death."

Nucky came out as we talked, and heard the boy's account. He said to me immediately, "I want to go home Friday."

"You are not strong enough for the walk," I said.

"I've got to go," he declared.

Saturday Night.

Nucky went home yesterday; and shortly after noon to-day I was surprised to see him ride down the road in front of the cottage, with a small bundle held on one arm. I called to him in surprise, and he halted. "It's the babe,—I brung it to see Blant," he said.

He unwrapped the blanket from the baby's head, and the poor little creature looked down at me with such big, sad eyes out of a tiny white face, that my heart was wrung within me.

I went on down to the jail with them. The keeper ushered us into the large room where Blant sat with the other prisoners (most of them nice boys, in only for moonshining, or for celebrating Christmas too enthusiastically); but he sat in a corner alone, while they played cards around a table.

Nucky went toward Blant with his bundle. "'Pears like the babe will pine to death for you, Blant," he said, "so I brung her over." He

opened the blanket, and with one ecstatic cry out of utmost depths of suffering, the little creature sprang forward, and buried her head in Blant's bosom.

Blant held her close, laid his head upon hers, and burst into a terrible storm of weeping, a storm that swept everything, and all of us, before it. Nucky and I wept together, the keeper stood with tears streaming down his cheeks, the card-playing boys, noisy and careless a moment before, to a man laid their heads on the table and wept. I am sure that before that tempest of emotion was over, it must have washed from Blant's heart some of its awful burden.

I slipped out and ran to the hospital for a nursing bottle and some milk, that Blant might feed the poor little starving babe. Oh how bright, how joyous, how pitiable, was the smile upon her tiny, pinched face as she laid aside her bottle repeatedly to assure herself by touch and sight that Blant still held her.

Late in the afternoon, when I begged to keep the babe during the night, Blant shook his head, and clasped her more strongly to his heart.

Sunday Night.

When Nucky and I stopped at the jail after church to-day, the keeper told us Blant had sat up all night with the babe in his arms. "'Peared like he couldn't part with her a' instant," he said; "I allow if anything can splice him on to life again, it will be her."

This raised my hopes. I saw now that Nucky had brought her for a double reason.

"May she stay here with him a while?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said; "of course it's again' the rules; but what's rules when a pore little innocent babe is pining to death?"

But when we spoke to Blant, our hopes were dashed to the ground. He said sternly, "No, it can't be,—Nucky never ought to have brung her,—she must be took back immediate. In a

little while more she'd have forgot me,—little young things like that can't have no very long recollections. Now, God help her, she'll have to start all over again. But it has to be,—it would be pure cruelty to keep her here and get her all wropped up in me again, only to face a' eternal parting."

The keeper pondered silently for quite a while; then he spoke up, firmly. "Blant," he said, "I got a confession to make to you, and pardon to ax of you, for what I have done. In the pity and tenderness of my heart, I have lied to you, and led you on to hope for a death sentence, when God knows there haint the ghost of a show you'll git one. In the first place, if you'll ricollect, there's a powerful prejudyce again' hanging in this country; in the next, I am sorry to tell you you haint done nothing to really earn the gallows. Everybody knows how it was betwixt you and Rich; and as for Todd and Elhannon and Ben and Jeems that you kilt, and

t'other Cheevers you wounded, why, that war is a family affair, in which the law haint got no particular call, or no great desire, to meddle, and wouldn't if you hadn't a-throwed yourself spang in its arms thisaway. As it is, you have put it in a mighty embarrassing position, and, as you might say, forced it to set up and take notice, and probably some kind of action,—it may be a couple of year' sentence to Frankfort, or some such, but certainly there haint a-going to be no hanging business. I hate to disapp'int your hopes of dying,—I know you don't take no easement or comfort in nothing else. But truth is truth. Now my advice to you is, be sensible, brace up, take some comfort, keep the babe here with you and git yourself sort of tied on to life again."

Blant's answer was angry and indignant. "May the earth open and swallow me before I take cheer or comfort in this world from which I have sent the friend of my bosom, my more

than brother! Till I have to, I haint going to give up the hope of laying down my life for his. If you lied to me once, you may be lying to me again. Take her, Nucky!"

He attempted to hand over the babe to Nucky; but it was not so easily accomplished. The process of separating her from him was such a painful one that he himself was almost unmanned, and again there was not a dry eye in the jail.

XXV

CHANGE AND GROWTH

Monday Night.

Mid-February.

It is six weeks since the roads became impassable for wagons, and already we begin to feel some of the effects of the isolation. Flour, sugar and coffee have to be very sparingly used. Of course there is plenty of corn-meal, beans, middling and sorghum, so there is no danger of starvation.

When Nucky returned this evening from taking the babe home, he came into my room, and threw himself on the floor. Presently I saw that his body was shaken with silent sobs. To my entreaties he at last replied,

"Things is terrible there at home,—paw is all wore-out with the trouble, and all Blant's jobs

he has to tend to, like cooking and minding the babe of nights, and he couldn't get along at all if Uncle Billy's boys didn't come down and chop wood, and feed the animals, and such. I ought to be home now tending to things for him; and I'll have to give up learning and go when crap-time comes. Blant never ought to have give hisself up,—he ought to have thought about his family, and not lost his head that way. They'll sure send him to Frankfort on his trial,—I heared some talk about it last week."

Indeed, it is a pitiable situation, and will be far more so if Blant is sent to the penitentiary. The thought hangs a new weight of dread upon me,—of course then Nucky will have to leave school and go home and take up Blant's burdens. My own selfish grief in the thought of losing Nucky ought not to protrude itself in the face of greater troubles,—but I have already lost so much,—must everything I set my affection upon be taken?

Saturday.

Yesterday Philip astonished me by asking for the wash-job. If there is anything on the place he has often expressed contempt for, it is the duties of the unfortunate wash-boy, who must rise before day on Saturdays to build fires and fill kettles, and then for nine long hours toil wearily, chopping wood, carrying water, and otherwise "slaving" for the wash-girls, until, when playtime comes, he is generally too tired to play; not to mention that every day in the week he must tend the ironing-stove, and, deepest indignity of all, take a hand at the ironing. No job is so consistently avoided by every boy on the place; while the carpenter- and shop-work, which Philip does exclusively, is considered the most aristocratic and desirable of all. I gladly transferred him, however; and this morning the explanation appeared, when Dilsey Warrick tripped over with the other nine wash-girls, having been shifted from the weaving to the washing department.

Sunday Night.

After church to-day, I myself heard some of the solid men of the community talking about Blant's case; and their words confirmed Nucky's statement of last week. I gather that public sentiment is pretty well crystallized into the feeling that a couple of years in Frankfort is about the least the reluctant law can do when forced to extremities. Sympathy for Blant is strong; but the determination is equally strong that his many lawless acts cannot be longer overlooked, and that the majesty of the law must be vindicated. Nucky, pale of face, hurried to the jail after hearing the talk, and Taulbee said to me as we came home,

"It looks now like Blant is bound for Frankfort; but I'll lay my hat he don't never get there,—not if Trojan can help it."

"He'll have to go if he is sent," I replied; "now he has put himself in the hands of the law, he must take his medicine, whatever it is."

"Who,—Blant? Him swallow anything he don't want to? I reckon not. There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

Wednesday, first week in March.

More distressing news from Trigger, when the mail-boy stopped to report to-day. "Same old story all over ag'in," he says, "the babe crying and puning constant, and plumb off its feed, and favoring a little picked bird. Minervy Saxby doubts it's a-holding out till the trial." I heard later he had taken the news on to Blant, through the bars of the jail window.

Saturday Evening.

Philip is in a seventh heaven. Every day in the week now he basks in Dilsey's presence two or three hours, cheerfully doing the menial tasks of keeping up fires and ironing; and on Saturdays he spends almost the entire day in her society, hanging out clothes, turning wringers, doing tremendous deeds on the wood-pile with his ax, running nimbly down and up the

rocky sides of the well when the chain breaks and the bucket falls in, as it is fond of doing, and, between labors, giving hazardous performances on the limb of a peach-tree. The teasings of the boys and girls seem powerless to dampen his ardor,—indeed, I suspect that their "Howdy, Mr. Warrick," "Good evening, Mrs. Floyd," fall as music on his ears.

Sunday Night.

When I went with Nucky to the jail this afternoon, I found that the rumors abroad for two weeks had reached it, indeed, they were being freely discussed by the prisoners, the keeper and Blant himself,—I was thankful to see that he was able to put his mind on the subject.

"Yes," he said sadly, "it looks like I'll have to give up the hope I have cherished, and try to get my consent to face life again; which God knows I couldn't if it wasn't brung home to me that I got a family depending on me, and a pore

little infant looking to me for life itself. Nothing else could ever give me courage to breast the waves of sorrow that swallows me up. But I reckon, after all, I have got a higher call to live than to die; and that, when they acquit me on my trial, constant hard labor for my family will in time take off some of the edge of my sorrow."

"But the probabilities is they *won't* acquit you, Blant," said the keeper impatiently; "I been trying to ding that into your head nigh a week. I told you plain what the talk was about sending you to Frankfort a couple of year'".

"I can't believe anything so unreasonable," replied Blant. "Now, a life for a life is just plain sense and common justice,—if they was to kill me for the lives I have took, especially Rich's, I would perfectly agree they was doing right. But what good or justice it would do anybody to shut me up in Frankfort when I'm so bad needed at home, I fail to see. Here I am, with a crippled paw, a living to make for a

large family, and the babe maw left in my hands to tend and raise,—you might say with my hands running over full,—now is there any sense in cooping me up where I can't do none of it? I allow not—it's plumb ridiculous,—no jury would be guilty of it; and if they was to, I haint willing to take it."

"I allow you'll have to, if it comes," said the keeper, sternly. "You'd ought to have thought of that sooner, and looked before you leaped. You certainly done the nearsightedest job ever I heared of when you give yourself up to the sheriff,—honest, I wouldn't have believed it of you, Blant,—but of course your mind was clean unhinged by misery, and you wa'n't accountable. And I'm sorry for you if you get sent up. But now you've throwed yourself in the arms of the law, you got to lay there. Whatever you do, take warning, and don't try no escapin' tricks here on me, like you done on the sheriff last spring. Because, whatever hap-

pens, and however good I like you—which I do, the best in the world—I want you to ricollect that law is law, and I'm its sworn gyuardeen, and obligated by my oath, and aiming to do my *whole duty*. And also, that I haint no poor shakes at gun-practice myself, though I may not be as sure a shot as you."

At the words, "as sure a shot as you," a spasm of anguish passed over Blant's face. "I wish to God I never had been no kind of a shot at all before I took the life of him I loved!" he exclaimed, wildly. "Don't never tell me of it, or call it to my recollection that I had the surest aim of any man in five counties; for the days of my gun-pride are over; I have shot my last shoot!"

Cries of amazement and incredulity rose on all sides. "You're crazy, Blant,—wouldn't you defend your life?" "Wouldn't you shoot for your freedom?" "Wouldn't you fight for your land if the Cheevers tuck it again?" To

all of which he returned the solemn answer, "No,—none of them things would now tempt me! The bullet that pierced my friend's heart was my last! Not for life, not for freedom, not for old ancestral land, will I shed another drap of human blood!"

Nucky heard these words of Blant's as if stunned and smitten, and walked home beside me in a daze.

XXVI

"MARVLES" AND MARVELS

Thursday.

Yesterday, when the ground was hard and smooth, but not too dry, marbles struck the school like a lightning express. It appears that before school in the morning Geordie had "trusted" a few leading spirits (Taulbee and Philip among the cottage boys, Lige Munn and Harl Drake among the day-pupils) with sets of marbles, giving them three days' time in which to pay him the ten cents a set. At noon play-time I was surrounded by a mob of my boys, loudly demanding extra work, while the wood-work teacher was beseiged by day-pupils of all sizes and ages, demanding extra jobs in the shop.

When Hen told me before supper that all the "day-schools" as well as the cottage boys were

buying "marvles" from Geordie, I said, "Oh, you must be mistaken. Geordie has not more than the dozen sets he traded you boys out of after Christmas, and possibly a few others collected before."

Hen looked wise. "You never knowed he had a marvle-mill a-running back yander in the branch, ever sence he got the stable-job?" he said.

"What in the world?" I demanded.

"Right there under the stable-lot fence, where the branch falls into Perilous, he took'n made him four little troughs, that takes streams out and draps 'em into four holes he's got hollered out in a flat rock underneath. All he's got to do is to put a chunk of sandstone in every hole, and the water keeps it a-whirling till first thing it knows it's a pure marvle; and then he puts in another chunk. He makes him twelve marvles a day thataway—it haint no trouble to drap in the chunks whilst he's watering the nags—and

he's been at it stiddy for six weeks. I kotch him at it one time, and he give me a set not to tell t'other boys. Marvles! Gee-oh, he's got 'em!"

Saturday Night.

Philip carries on his siege with characteristic vigor, leaving nothing undone to win the citadel of Dilsey's difficult affections, and enduring as best he may the painful moments caused by her too-great particularity in trifles. This morning I passed down through the back yard while the washing was in full progress. The girls were working and singing at their tubs under the big sycamore. A little to one side, Philip was energetically turning the wringer for Dilsey. He paused, as I passed, to blow his nose after the good old fashion of our first parents, to be cruelly reminded by her, "I allus blow *mine* on a handkerchief!"

Tuesday.

Blant's declaration that he has "shot his last shoot" has become widely known, and occasions

"'I kotch him at it one time.'"

a sensation. The boys are incredulous. Taulbee said this evening (Nucky being at the jail),

"Of course he never meant it,—a hero like Blant to give up his life, or his freedom, or his land, for the lack of a shot? No, I'll bound you he said it to throw dust in their eyes so's they won't look for him to escape. If Blant could get his fingers on a forty-five, they'd soon see whether he'd shoot!"

Friday.

Excited groups dot the school-yard and cottage-grounds every recess and playtime, and cries of "No inchin's!", "My taw!", "Pickin's on me!", "No back-killin's!", "I beat, but you git the goes!" fill the air. Marbles is such a quiet and genteel game, comparatively speaking, and with so much less menace to life and limb than preceding ones, that I encourage and forward it in every way, and sincerely hope it will last out the term. The boys seem most

unfortunate, however, about losing their marbles, and are constantly asking for extra work in order to buy more. I have already given Jason money to buy half a dozen sets.

Saturday Night.

This afternoon, after the arduous labors of the day, and an hour of play, Philip was sitting on the back cottage-steps eating a huge chunk of "sugar-tree-sugar" he had just bought in the village, the other boys leaving their marbles and gathering about him like flies as he drew forth the great, sticky lump, though with but faint hope in their eyes. Sure enough, he made no motion to break it up or pass it around (Taulbee, with whom he usually shares, is at home for the week-end). So Philip sat and licked and crunched in solitary state. Just at this juncture, four of the wash-girls, including Dilsey, suddenly appeared round the corner of the house, on some unexpected errand. Dilsey stopped in her tracks, and took in the situation. Then

walking on, she remarked casually to the peach-tree, "I'd sooner die as to marry a greedy man!"

Flushed and angry, Philip sprang to his feet. "You needn't talk, missy,—I give you more'n I kep',—more'n you could eat!"

"Yes, and I give very near all of mine to the girls; but you haint never give them boys nary grain of your'n, that I can see!"

Philip wavered a bare instant, then, "'Cause I haint had time yet," he said, "I was just a-fixing to break it up with this-here rock, and give 'em some."

"Well, I would, if I was you," murmured Dilsey, with decision, as she passed on.

As Philip smashed angrily away with the rock, I marvelled at the vast power in women's hands, and wished there were more Dilseys with the courage to use it.

Sunday.

Flour all gone,—no more biscuit from now on until the roads open—and no sugar for the little coffee that remains.

Monday Evening.

To-day the rumor is flying that the remaining Cheevers set the fence up again on the Marrs land Friday and Saturday, taking their time, in known security from interruption. Nucky disappeared at noon,—of course he has gone home.

Tuesday Night.

I was late going over to supper this evening, and had turned out the lights and was locking my door to leave when Nucky ran into the cottage. He did not see me in the shadow, and evidently believed the house to be deserted, for he flung himself down before the fire in a passion of fury and despair, beating the floor with hands and feet. I waited until the storm had subsided a little, then stepped forward into the firelight.

"What does this mean?" I asked.

"Mean!" he replied. "It means that Blant has took leave of his senses,—that he aint at himself no more,—that he has gone plumb back on everything!"

"Explain yourself," I said.

"I heared the Cheevers had set the fence back, and went over, and there it was, built good and strong, on our land. I knowed I couldn't do nothing myself; but I said, 'This will wake Blant; he will break prison and come back to us now, like I been a-begging him. He can clean out the jail and make his escape in ten seconds with his forty-five.' So I got it, and brung it over, and tuck it down to the jail this evening at the time I knowed Joe would begin to take the boys off to their cells for the night. I never went in, but talked to Blant at the window, and told him the Cheevers had the fence sot up, and how bad everything was at home. Then Joe he begun to take the boys off,

and soon as he turnt his back, I slipped the forty-five through the bars to Blant. 'Shoot him down when he comes back,' I says, 'and take the keys and run out,—it haint no trouble at all!' Blant he sort of jumped when he seed it; then he heared Joe a-coming, and turnt around with his back again' the window. 'Joe,' he says, solemn, 'you and t'other boys here never believed me when I said I had shot my last shoot,—you thought I was just a-talking. Now I will prove it to you. Nucky here has just brung me word that the Cheevers has sot up the fence on our land again; he has begged me to make my escape and settle 'em; he has also brung me the means of doing it. Joe,' he says, 'when you stepped in the door there, I could have shot you dead with my forty-five.' He stepped aside from the window, where the pistol was laying. 'Take it, Joe,' he says, 'I refuse to touch it; I have shot my last shoot!' Joe come acrost the room white as a sheet.

"'Take it, Joe, I refuse to touch it, I have shot my last shoot!'"

'That's mighty fair of you, Blant,' he says, putting it in his pocket; 'you held my life in your hand.' 'If it was the life of my worst enemy,—if it was all the Cheevers put together—it would be the same,' says Blant; 'I am cured of killing; Rich's death has showed me the terribleness of it; I shoot no more!' And then seemed like I would choke if I looked at him another minute, and I run off. And now nothing haint no use,—Blant's lost his senses, and nothing can't bring him to 'em!" Again he beat the floor despairingly.

"So far from losing his senses," I said, "he has just come to them. It took the terrible death of his friend to show him the sacredness of human life, and the worthlessness of pride, freedom, or land in comparison with it. This is hard for you to understand, Nucky; but be sure that this evening Blant has done the greatest, most heroic act of his life."

The storm of disappointment and anger was

too great, however; it continued to sweep him until he heard the boys coming and hurried away to bed.

XXVII

TRANSFORMATION

Wednesday.

Sad news again from Trigger about the babe. "Nothing but a pitiful little passel of bones," said the mail-boy; "purely dying for lack of Blant."

Blant's refusal to use his gun last night has spread abroad, and creates great excitement. "Trojan fotch him his revolver and he wouldn't tech it or use it," is the talk flying about among the boys. "Aiming to let the Cheevers keep his land." "Done give up the war." "Haint going to make no effort to break prison." "Never heared tell of no hero doing such a way!" "Achilles wouldn't," "Nor Hector, neither." Evidently they feel bitter disappointment. They do not dare show it before Nucky, however, or even broach the subject in his presence.

I called them in to-night and talked to them about the superiority of moral courage to physical,—with, I fear, no great result. How terribly true are Paul's words, "First the natural man, then"—after what awful birth-pangs, sometimes as cruel as those Blant is experiencing!—"the spiritual".

Saturday.

More and more distressing accounts of the babe. "Minervy Saxby says it won't hold out till the trial." "Just lays and pines and moans." "You can count every bone in its body". Poor Blant! When he hears this, as he certainly will, will he regret that he did not use the revolver? The trial is only ten days off; but if the two-years' penitentiary sentence is to follow, as everybody says it will, there will be no chance whatever for the babe—even a two-weeks' sentence would be too long. I had hoped that Blant's refusal to use his gun on the keeper might turn the tide of public sentiment

in favor of an acquittal; but that seems not to be so much as thought of. Nucky has apparently lost all hope and courage, and goes about in miserable, despairing silence. Probably it is as well for him that he is to leave school the end of next week and shoulder the hard work and heavy responsibilities at home,—action may relieve his suffering of mind. But it is harder than I can say for me to let him go, and to know that I am giving him up for at least two years,—probably forever. Indeed, when I think of the whole situation,—the desperate condition of the Marrs family, the dying state of the babe, the tragedy of a boy of Nucky's wonderful promise having to give up schooling and bow his shoulders under a man's burden at twelve years old, I am tempted to wish that in some way, not of bloodshed, Blant could have managed to escape.

Thursday.

Marbles is still in full sway,—I have never seen the boys so fascinated by any game,—they

spend at least three-fourths of their playtime making money to buy marbles to play with the other fourth,—for they continue to lose incredible numbers of them. I gave Jason a dime to buy his tenth set to-day.

Geordie informed me as he started to bed a few minutes ago that he had enough money laid by now to take that trip to Virginia this summer and see his mother and the world and the railroad-train. In spite of his talents, I wonder that he has managed to get that much together.

Vacation is just a little over a month distant now, and Keats and Hen are already making great plans as to the work they will perform for Nervesty during the summer, and all the others who have homes are looking forward eagerly. A few,—all my motherless ones, I hope—will remain here with me to attend to the gardening during the summer. I had of course planned for Nucky to stay with me; but pain takes the place of the pleasure I had anticipated.

First Sunday in April.

To-day Philip was a living monument to the transforming power of love. Very clean, very much combed and brushed and collared and tied, with a large handkerchief, soaked in my cologne, held prominently in one hand, and an expression as decorous and pious as any ever achieved by Geordie Yonts, he sat in church the very picture of elegance, the real direction of his thoughts being indicated by an occasional ardent glance across the aisle, where Dilsey, fairer, more saint-like than ever, kept serious eyes on the preacher. As I looked, I asked myself, Can this be the boy who a few short months ago declined to perform the most rudimentary rites of the toilet, gloried in tatters, declared that "when a man steps in the door, looks flies up the chimley", denominated "polite" a "lick-spittle", asserted that he would rather take off his hat to a cow than a woman, and pronounced the story of his chivalric namesake a "slander"?

"He sat in church the very picture of elegance, the real direction of his thoughts indicated by an occasional ardent glance across the aisle."

This afternoon, however, came the grand climax. After the dish-washing, the cottage boys and ten wash-girls came quietly over to the cottage yard and seated themselves on back steps and walk. As Hen ran through to join them I inquired, "What's going on?"

"Philip he's aiming to give a treat, and done axed all us boys and wash-girls to it," he replied in an astonished voice, hurrying on. I, too, remembering the consistent selfishness following upon the declaration that "generous never put no bread in my belly", was astonished. A few moments later I stepped to the open window and looked out upon a surprising scene. Philip, as suave, knightly and beautiful as his famous namesake could ever have been in the days when he sighed for Stella and all other women for him, was passing around a large "poke" of crackers, and another of brown sugar, and saying with graceful flourishes and insistent politeness,

"Eat all you can, now, everybody,—I got more still when you git through this. There, Jason, wait till the girls is helped,—ladies first, son,—haint you got no manners? Take some, Nancy, eat a-plenty, Rosabel, don't hold back, Narcissa, here's a good lump, Dilsey. Now, boys, pitch in,—you little fellows, Iry, Hen, Jason, take your pick first,—the big boys waits till after you,—I don't aim to see you run over. Don't be afeared, take all you need! Now Taulbee, Killis, Hose, Keats, everybody,—dive in! Just eat all you can hold, and fill up your bel—stummicks. I love to see folks eat and enjoy theirselves. No thank you, I wouldn't choose none myself,—'druther see the rest eat! I spent thirty cents on them crackers, and thirty-five on that 'ere sugar,—dag gone, I reckon a man't works hard for his money's got the right to spend it to suit him! Some folks haint fitten to live,—wants to eat up all they git theirselves; but I like to pass around mine, I

do,—it makes me happy. What's the use of livin' if you can't make folks see a good time? Gee-oh, I aim to make me a big grain of money this summer, so's I can give a treat onct a month come next school; and I want every man-jack of you, and ladies too, to come every time. Dad burn ole Heck, generous never ruint nobody!"

Almost unable to believe my eyes and ears, I stood, murmuring to myself, "And they say the day of miracles is past!"

Nucky alone was absent from the feast, visiting Blant. On his return, there was a surprising change in his demeanor. He appeared to have shed several years of age and care, played boisterously about the yard, got into two or three fights, and a short while after we began reading to-night leaped from his chair to the table, where he executed a wild war-dance. All of which distressed me not a little, and seemed perfectly unaccountable.

The thought that he was sitting beside me, and leaning his head on my shoulder, for probably the last time, was eating into my heart; and his carelessness of the fact hurt me deeply. But of course parting means little to the very young.

XXVIII

"KEEPS"

Tuesday.

Going to the village on an errand after breakfast, when I reached the deep mudholes where we always have to walk the fence some distance, I was delighted to see a gang of men at work on the road, and to recognize in them Blant and the other prisoners. They were picking the shale from the mountain side, and shovelling it into the bottomless holes, and all, save Blant, were hilariously happy to be out in the spring sunshine and fresh air, and talked gaily with me and other passers-by, the keeper, who leaned on his rifle, entering amiably into the conversation. He says that every spring the prisoners are brought out to work on the roads,—that it does them good, and the county too. I had not seen

Blant for quite a while. It seemed to me that the sadness and sternness of his face were a little relaxed, and I rejoiced to know that time was doing something toward making his sorrow for Rich less poignant. I hope that the news I had Saturday about the babe,—that it is nothing but a feather, and must soon blow away—has not reached him.

Wednesday Night.

For two days the boys, especially Nucky, have made every excuse to run down the road and exchange words with the road-gang, who continue to work toward us. These frequent glimpses of Blant seem to maintain Nucky's spirits at the same high pitch manifested Sunday. While I am in the lowest depths over losing him in three more days, and while it seems to me his grief over Blant's trial and probable departure for Frankfort next week, and the almost certain loss of the babe, should hang more heavily than ever upon him, he is

out shouting at marbles, or chasing the other boys about,—indeed, I never saw him in such spirits.

Thursday Night.

Nucky brought in word to-day that the mud-holes are nearly filled, and the prisoners preparing to-morrow to blast out rock and widen the road at the narrow place where our school-grounds begin.

What was my pained astonishment when, in the afternoon, the heads sent for me and said, "We have just heard down in the village that this school is a notorious gambling-place; that the boys do nothing but play keeps; and that some of yours are the ringleaders."

After supper I called the twelve around the sitting-room table, and laid the matter before them. "To think," I said, "that you could deceive me in this way, and play this game for more than six weeks when you have been told over and over that all gambling is forbidden

here! Now, are you all guilty, or is there by chance one who has had the self-respect and moral courage not to play?"

All heads hung limp except Geordie's. Both his head and his hand went up. "I never," he said, "I haint toch my hand to a game of keeps this whole school."

"Thank heaven," I said, surprised but grateful.

But Taulbee was slowly rising in his chair, eyes glued on Geordie, finger pointing. "'F you never played no keeps, where'd you git all them marvles you been a-selling us right along?" he demanded.

"I made 'em," replied Geordie.

"I know you made 'em at first, in that mill we broke up for you under the stable-lot fence. But you sold all them out the first week,—I seed you sell the last. Where'd you get t'others you been selling sence? I bought four sets off of you, and Philip six, and Killis and Keats about

nine apiece, and Jason I reckon a dozen, and all the rest of the boys and the day-schools has been running to you a month, and sweating to get money to pay you for marvles. Where'd they come from?"

"Did you ever see me play ary keep this school?" inquired Geordie.

"Don't know as I did; but I seed you hangin' round all the time."

Geordie turned to Philip: "Didn't you see me git beat every time I played last summer?" he inquired.

"Yes, I did," replied Philip.

"Well, I haint played no more keeps sence. I know I can't play, and I haint fool enough to throw away good marvles."

Convinced but not satisfied, Taulbee frowned darkly. "Well, dad burn your looks, where'd you git all them marvles you been selling this spring," he demanded, "they never growed on trees." The finger was no longer pointing,

"'Well, dad burn your looks, where'd you git all them marvles you been selling ? '"

it was doubled up in a fist under Geordie's nose.

At last came the hesitating, reluctant answer: "Me'n' Lige Munn and Harl Drake and Benoni Somers went pardners."

"You put up the marvles and them the fingers?"

"Yes, and they's the best players in school, and allus cleans out t'other boys; and I'm right smart of a good trader, and git a better price than they could; so they puts in all their time a-winning, and turns all the marvles over to me to sell; and then I git the halves on every marvle."

"And then you set up and tell her you haint played nary keep this school?"

"I *haint* never played none," reaffirmed Geordie, in conscious innocence; "I never toch my hand to nary keep this whole school!"

The whites of Taulbee's eyes were now red; he ground his teeth. "Dad swinge your ole grave-

robber soul, I aim to kill you dead," he shouted, leaping across the table, and followed by every boy but Absalom in the direction of the unfortunate Geordie.

It was ten minutes before I, with the assistance of Absalom and a broomstick, rescued a torn and bleeding victim from the howling, threshing mass under which he was buried, and sent for the trained nurse.

I have sat here to-night wondering at the light my acquaintance with Geordie has shed upon the vexed questions of accumulation of capital, formation of trusts, cornering of markets, dealings in futures, and, last but not least, the perfect compatibility of sharp-practice and law-breaking with sincere piety and philanthropy.

But alas, these are only surface thoughts,—deep in my heart is the sharp knowledge that to-morrow I must lose Nucky, and that he cares very little that he must go and leave me.

XXIX

LIBERTY AND NEW LIFE

Friday.

At daybreak this morning, heavy detonations began to rend the air, and we knew that the road-blasting had begun. It was almost impossible to get the cottage cleaned,—the boys, especially Nucky, hung out of windows and doors, eagerly watching the puffs of smoke down the road, and listening for the loud reports. As we went over to breakfast, we could see Blant and the others at work. I noticed that Nucky ate not a bite, and was very pale,—I hoped that he was at last realizing it was his last day with me, and was feeling some of the pain I felt in the separation. We were all pouring out of the dining-room after the meal, when several sharp, near-by gun-shots, following

a particularly loud blast of powder, sent all flying to the front. Up the steep mountain side facing the school a man was leaping, while down in the road below ran another, stopping only to aim and fire.

"It's Blant!" called out a score of voices; "he's got away! Go it, Blant,—run, oh, run!"

It was indeed Blant, making desperate speed up the steep slope. The mountain is cleared halfway, not a rock or a tree affording shelter; above that is the timber-line. All the school was by this time at the fence, breathlessly watching the breathless ascent. The keeper, selecting a vantage-ground just outside the school gate, took his stand and grimly proceeded to do his "whole duty," firing swiftly, calmly, surely, at the flying figure. In running accompaniment to the gun-shots, Nucky's voice rang out sharp and clear. "Keep to the right a little-grain!" "Drap down in the swag there, so's he can't hit you so easy!" "Make

for them spruce-pines! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" Bullets raised tiny clouds of dust about Blant's feet, and on the slope just ahead of him; the seconds seemed ages; our hearts stood still. Once he stopped short, clutching his left arm; then ran on again, more swiftly than ever, his arm dangling strangely. Nucky's voice, edged with agony, faltered no more than did the bullets. "Can't you move no quicker'n that? Seems like I could crawl faster! Once you reach the timber, he'll never hit you! Oh, hurry! hurry! hurry! You're getting nigh now. The trees! the trees! the trees! Oh God, he's to 'em,—he's safe!"

And, indeed, he was. After a few parting shots into the timber, the keeper shook his head, mopped the sweat from his brow, shouldered his gun and turned to the other prisoners, who had followed him down the road, and to the rest of us.

"Well," he said, "I done my best, as my oath

"Nucky's voice rang out sharp and clear . . 'Make for them spruce pines! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!'"

required, though sore again' my will. But he had too good a start. It certainly was pyeert of him to get on the far side from me before that big blast went off; and it tuck me plumb by surprise. Of course I looked for him to try to escape at the first; but after he refused to use his gun to get away, I give up the notion, though I mind now he said plain he wa'n't willing to go to Frankfort. Well, I never done a more painful thing than try to kill him as he run for his life,—if he was my own brother I couldn't have felt worse—but public servants is called on to do mighty onnatural and disagreeable things sometimes. And now that I tried my best and failed, I am free to say I'm glad none of them bullets never hit no vital, and that it was his arm, not his heart, I put out of business.

"Yes, I consider that 'ere Blant as perfect a gentleman as ever I seed; and I think it was a mighty sensible thing of him not to stay and

stand trial and go to Frankfort. Why, Frankfort is intended for criminals, and God knows that boy haint got a criminal bone in him, and never did have. Of course his mistake was in ever givin' himself up when he kilt Rich and Todd,—that was the dad-burn foolishest thing ever I heared of, and come nigh being his ruination, and that of his family.

"Well, I reckon he's making tracks for home and the babe now—God grant the pore little creetur'll live till he gits there—and I expect he will rest pretty oneasy for a few days, allowing me and the sheriff will be low-down enough to hunt him. Which knowing the law like we do, we haint got the least notion of,—one of the very pillars of the criminal law is that no man's life shall be twice in jeopardy for the same offense; and certainly Blant's life couldn't be worse jeoparded than it was by my gun this hour; and being as the law is satisfied, I am, and I may confidently say the sheriff will be. Yes,

I allow that by next week Blant will be out in perfect peace, putting in his crap. I hate to think of his feelings over seeing his land in Cheever possession; but I'll lay my life he'll stand to his word not to shoot another shot, and that the Marrs-Cheever war is over."

When I turned around a little later, Nucky, who had been at my side, was gone,—doubtless to see Blant safely home, and to take him the word of his immunity from capture.

Saturday, Bed-time.

To-night Nucky came back, more radiant and happy than I have ever seen him, to be greeted by the unanimous question, "How long has Blant been aiming to escape?"

"Ever sence he heared he would be sent to Frankfort,—he never had no notion of going there. He has knowed all along the prisoners was going to work the road, and fixed on that as his best chance to get away. If he'd a-told me sooner, I'd have felt better,—but he never

did till last Sunday. Then I felt happy again, though of course I was afeared Joe's gun might stop him.

"But now he's home, and the babe's nigh dead with happiness, but aiming to live when she gits used to it, and paw is all holp up in his spirits, and the young uns has got their minds and stomachs comforted, and a big crap's a-going in immediate, and everything's all right."

There was silence for quite a while; then Taulbee inquired, in a low voice, as one may speak of the dead,

"Has the Cheevers got the bottom?"

A wave of color surged over Nucky's face, and then receded, leaving him deathly pale.

"Yes, they got it," he answered slowly, painfully, at last; "Blant sent 'em word he give it to 'em, and wisht he could give 'em back the lives he tuck, too."

Another deep silence followed; then there was a still more searching question:

"Do you aim to let 'em keep it when you git grown?"

Nucky closed his eyes; his face was sharp and tense with the inward struggle; his breath came with difficulty. It was a long time before he spoke; then,

"I allow I'll be the same kind of a hero Blant is," he replied.

Easter Sunday.

It is the season of new life. To-day the brown mountain sides are suddenly clothed with innumerable tender shades of green, and against them the exquisite "sarvice" tree, incomparable symbol of spiritual renascence, stands forth in unearthly beauty. It speaks to me not only of the awakening of Blant and Nucky to higher things, and of the coming day when from all hearts shall be cast out the "dread brood of Chaos and Old Night," pride, hatred and warfare, but of my own wonderful resurrection from grief, despair and selfishness to life and

love and service. Now that I have Nucky back again, my joy is perfect, my cup overflows. To-day I have written my agent to accept one of the offers I have had for the old home,—the proceeds shall be used for sending my boys to college when the time comes. Henceforth my home is here,—here, where my once lonely and drifting barque is held in a fair harbor by twelve strong anchors. Lapped continually by warm tides of love and youth and joy. And my dearest hope is that the rest of my days may be spent Mothering on Perilous.

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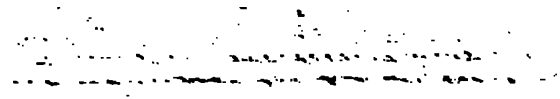

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